**Don't forget Burmese refugees here too, PM told**
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Even as Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi pledges humanitarian aid to cyclone-ravaged Burma, he should not forget the Burmese refugees in Malaysia who face a number of serious problems.
MCPX

Migrant workers lobby group Tenaganita said the government, through people's volunteer corps Rela, cannot continue to oppress and repress the refugees at gunpoint, as done by the military junta that rules Burma.

tenaganita rubber board plantation workers plight 130807 ireneDirector Irene Fernandez said in a statement today that "more than 60,000 Burmese refugees with children are being hunted down with a form of vengeance by Rela and the immigration department".

"They are mercilessly arrested and detained (under) inhuman conditions in various immigration detention centres," she stated.

She said the riot at the Lenggeng centre on April 21 was reflective of the "harsh treatment... and mismanagement of the camps by immigration and Rela authorities".

Fernandez also cited a local television report which alleged the involvement of enforcement officers in trafficking men, women and children from the refugee community during the deportation process to the Thailand border.

"(This) smacks of embedded corruption and blatant arrogance and abuse of power of the enforcement agencies," she said.

"To date, the home minister has not made public the investigations carried out on these agencies and what steps are being taken to make them accountable."

**'Increase in arrests'**

She claimed that arrests, abuse and sale of refugees have increased, causing even greater fear of "this form of state violence and repression".

rohingya refugees"Why are we arresting them and selling them as slaves or threatening them with deportation to Burma when we know that their lives will be at great risk, even of death? Is this not brutally inhuman?

"Knowing very well the deep political crisis in Burma and now, with the catastrophe (caused by) Cyclone Nargis ...We should start our humanitarian response to the refugees here by stopping arrests of all refugees and going further to recognise them as refugees."

syed hamid albar 02Tenaganita also urged Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar to investigate the continued abuse and alleged trafficking of refugees, as well as complaints of corruption and other reports against Rela and immigration officials.

"It is only in recognising the truth and acting to redress the intense human rights violations

perpetrated against the refugee community that we can regain our humanity as a nation," she added.

Cyclone Nargis, which struck the Irrawaddy delta in Burma on May 2, has caused extensive destruction. At least 30,000 people have died and 1.5 million are in desperate need of food, water and shelter.

Malaysia is among countries that have sent essential supplies to Burma to help with immediate relief efforts.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International Malaysia calls on the government to review its policy on the non-recognition of Burmese refugees in this country.

"The government in its response to provide assistance to Burma must not ignore its responsibility and commitment to the rights and humanitarian needs of thousands of refugees who fled human rights violations and persecution in Burma seeking protection right here in our country," said Amnesty campaign coordinator K Shan.

"The Malaysian government must take note that Burmese refugees continue to face arrest, detention, prosecution and deplorable living conditions here in Malaysia as a result of the government's refusal to recognise and protect refugees and to treat them as illegal immigrants."

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