

NST - 22/9/2000

Dr M: We'll treat them as war refugees

SHAH ALAM, Thurs. — Filipinos entering Malaysia from the Southern Philippines to escape attacks by the military forces there will be treated as war refugees, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

“If they come, we will treat them like we treated the Vietnamese (refugees) previously,” he said.

Dr Mahathir said the refugees would be placed in special centres and treated as war refugees and no longer as illegal immigrants.

He said they would not be allowed to leave the place unless they were willing to return home.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after opening the International Convention on the Role of the Media in Non-Aligned Countries at the Grand Blue Wave Hotel.

He was asked on the possibility of an influx of residents from the southern Philippines fleeing attacks by Philippines troops on Abu Sayyaf strongholds in that area.

The Philippines military forces launched the attacks last week in efforts to free 17 people, including three Malaysians, who were reported to be held captive on Jolo Island in the southern Philippines.