

'Malaysia Solution' still possible, says ex-Aussie minister
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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 21 — A former immigration minister in Australia has suggested a compromise to the controversial "Malaysia Solution", saying the deal "could work" if Malaysia promised not to return asylum seekers to the countries persecuting them, ABC news reported today.

Phillip Ruddock, now a Liberal backbencher, said the Labor government could also consider temporary protection visas and "a willingness to turn boats back when safe" as a part of its strategy when pitching the compromise to the federal opposition.

Ruddock, said the news report, also backed Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's refusal to negotiate with Immigration Minister Chris Bowen until the latter presents a formal proposal for the compromise.

"My view is that all of the measures that we have proposed that were used by the Howard government need to be utilised now if we're going to turn this tap off.

"At the moment you've got an extraordinarily large number of people, very much larger than we had to deal with, seeking to access Australia through people smugglers, and you need to use all of the weapons in your armoury if you're going to be able to deal with it," Ruddock was quoted as saying.

The report, however, noted that Bowen had refused Abbott's suggestion, saying, "Our preferred option is simply to sit in a room and work it through together."

The Australian government previously reached a stalemate over the controversial refugee swap deal, forcing Prime Minister Julia Gilliard to abandon the proposed law after failing to summon enough parliamentary support.

Changes to the Immigration Act were proposed after the Australian High Court ruled it was illegal for Canberra to send asylum seekers to Malaysia as it could not guarantee their safety.

The offshore processing deal would have seen Malaysia exchange 4,000 refugees for 800 asylum seekers from Australia over a period of four years.

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