

Putrajaya says no to UN refugees working here
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By Jennifer Gomez

Putrajaya will not allow refugees holding United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) cards to work in Malaysia, Deputy Human Resource Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Abdul Muttalib told the Senate today.

UNHCR had made an appeal to the government on Monday to allow UNHCR registered refugees, most of whom are from Myanmar to be allowed to work here.

According to statistics released by the UNHCR office in Kuala Lumpur, there were 153,004 asylum seekers and refugees registered with UNHCR up to May 31.

The deputy minister said allowing them to work was against the Immigration Act, which did not allow those without valid travel documents to be salaried in Malaysia.

He said another concern was that allowing them to work would encourage more refugees waiting at the borders to enter Malaysia, adding that it will cause the situation to spiral out of control.

"We already have 1.9 million registered foreign workers in Malaysia, we are also concerned that these people will now use this to try and apply for refugee status while they are here," Ismail told the Senate.

The deputy minister said Putrajaya did not want to send out the wrong signal on its policy on refugees by allowing them to work here.

"If we allow them to work, they are going to ask for other privileges such as education, medical and so on.

"We are sympathetic to their plight, but we cannot be giving them jobs," Ismail said.
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