

Maintain Proper Records Of Syrian Refugees To Prevent Misuse Of IDs, Government Told Bernama

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By Mohd Hisham Abdul Rafar

KUALA LUMPUR, (Bernama) -- Malaysia's decision to open its doors to 3,000 Syrian refugees and even issue special identity cards (IDs) to them has taken many by surprise.

No doubt, it is a humanitarian-based decision but many groups have expressed their concern that the refugees might take advantage of their status to indulge in unlawful activities.

Dean of Universiti Teknologi MARA's (UiTM) Faculty of Information Management at its Puncak Perdana campus in Shah Alam, Asso Prof Dr Mohd Sazili Shahibi said he supported the issuing of special IDs to the Syrian refugees as it would help to authenticate their status.

"However, they have to be closely monitored to ensure that they don't abuse their IDs. The authorities must also devise a system to keep tabs on the cards to ensure that they are not used by unauthorised people.

"There has to be a proper mechanism to ensure that the IDs can be monitored effectively. This is only possible through the systematic management of information, which not only warrants the proper maintenance of all the refugees' records but also provides easy access to information when the need arises," he told Bernama.

In his speech at the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly on Oct 1, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Malaysia would take in 3,000 Syrian refugees over the next three years to help alleviate the refugee crisis.

NEED FOR ACCURATE, SPEEDY DATA RETRIEVAL SYSTEM

He had said that Muslim countries were partly responsible for ensuring the well-being of the marginalised Syrians fleeing their country in massive numbers, causing social and economic stresses in Europe.

According to reports, over the past four years, some four million Syrian refugees had fled to neighbouring countries and were living in abject poverty.

On Oct 2, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the Syrian refugees, who would be arriving in stages, would be provided with shelter, education opportunities and temporary jobs.

He also announced that the Home Ministry would issue special IDs, which possess state-of-the-art security features, for the use of the refugees during their stay in Malaysia.

Mohd Sazili, meanwhile, said any information system used for storing records of the Syrian

refugees should have the capacity to enable the retrieval of data accurately and speedily. Hence, the telecommunications infrastructure supporting such a system should always be stable to enable the authorities to access the data at any time.

"Such an information system will come in useful whenever the authorities wish to verify the authenticity of any Syrian refugee's ID. If they find that the information on the ID doesn't tally with the official data provided in the system, then they can immediately take action against the fake ID-holder," he said.

SUBJECT TO MANIPULATION

Mohd Sazili said any individual's personal records could be manipulated in the absence of an official information management system.

"In order to maintain the integrity of any (official) document, attention must be paid to securing the information it contains - otherwise the document can be misused.

"It's vital to maintain the integrity of the document to avoid confusion and to safeguard national security," he added.

Senior lecturer at UiTM's Faculty of Information Management Mohd Nizam Yunus suggested that the government create a an integrated database for all the Syrian refugees entering the country and make it accessible to all enforcement agencies.

Such a database was essential to eliminate the possibility of criminal elements amending their records.

"Some of the refugees may possess personal documents but others may not have any papers with them and the process of documenting them may turn out to be problematic.

"Nevertheless, Malaysia must make it a point to screen them closely to ensure that IS elements do not enter our country," he told Bernama.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also Home Minister, had said that the arrival of the Syrian refugees would be facilitated by the Immigration Department based on its current laws.

He added that the ministry would work with the International Organisation for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to issue the IDs to the refugees concerned.

UNHCR representative Richard Towle was reported to have said on Oct 3 that the agency was willing to cooperate with Malaysia in its efforts to take in the Syrian refugees.

As of August, a total of 153,000 refugees and asylum seekers were registered with the UNHCR, with 93 per cent of them originating from Myanmar. The rest were from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Palestine.

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