

# Malaysia should present report on treatment of migrants - Dr Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR, July 21 -- The government should present a report on the way it handled illegal immigrants as part of its efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, the Dewan Rakyat was told today.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (Independent-Langkawi) said this would be a better way to clarify the issue than taking action against those who made a documentary on the matter.

"I am aware that illegal immigrants created a lot of problems especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were afraid to introduce themselves because they would be sent back. But they had to be identified so that they would not become a COVID-19 cluster.

"Foreigners like to accuse us of being rough towards immigrants but Europe, the United States and India were rougher," he said when debating the motion of thanks for the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's address.

Al Jazeera had aired a 25-min and 50-sec documentary criticising Malaysia's treatment of illegal immigrants when the country was making efforts to curb the spread of the deadly coronavirus, and police are investigating the report.

Dr Mahathir said although Malaysia is not a developed country, it treated immigrants well and this caused some seven million migrants to flock to the country.

"We gave them good treatment but there have been cases where we seemed inconsiderate," he added.

Meanwhile, he said racial polarisation in the country can be reduced if the government is capable of tackling economic disparities between races.

Dr Mahathir said racial differences would not lead to rioting if there are no elements of disparity in terms of wealth distribution.

"We cannot change (a person's) race. But we can narrow the gap, the economic disparities between races. If this gap can be reduced, the bad effects of having different races can be mitigated," he added.

He said a scientific study should be done to determine why the issue of racial polarisation had arisen.

Citing the New Economic Policy which was implemented following the May 13, 1969 incident, Dr Mahathir said the policy had succeeded in reducing the gap in economic achievements between the races in Malaysia.

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