TITLE: Vincent Tan gets Erdogan to help refugees

ISTANBUL: Berjaya group founder Tan Sri Vincent Tan scored big time in his bid to assist Syrian refugees in Turkey, after a fruitful meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday.

Speaking to the press after visiting the president, Tan revealed that Erdogan has agreed to provide a piece of land to the Tzu Chi Foundation of which he is a volunteer, for the purpose of building a new school for the refugees.

In addition, the president also agreed to provide Advanced Continuing Education (ACE) certificates to up to 3,000 refugee students each year.

This is an increase from the current quota of only 531, which will allow their examination results to be recognised in other countries when furthering their studies.

Currently, some 3,000 Syrian children are pursuing their education at the El Menahil International School, which is deemed by the Turkish government to be over-populated.

Tan, who was ostensibly upbeat and cheerful during the press conference, described the hour-long meeting with Erdogan as “very positive”, saying the president is extremely supportive of Tzu Chi’s plans and works.

“We came here to help Tzu Chi in their bid to assist the refugees, and I think we have achieved much more than we initially expected, especially after we managed to pay a courtesy call on the president.

“Because Tzu Chi did not have access or direct contact with the government, I used whatever contacts I have to meet Erdogan,” he said.

Tan added he is also looking at possibly investing in the tourism sector in Istanbul, and is considering developing a hotel here.

Present at the meeting with the president were, among others, Turkish Ambassador to Malaysia Merve Kavakci, Top Glove Corporation Bhd executive chairman Tan Sri Dr Lim Wee Chai, Berjaya Times Square chief operating officer Morvin Tan, as well as Faisal Hu and wife Nadia Chou, -- a couple who leads Tzu Chi’s Istanbul chapter.

Faisal said Erdogan has agreed to arrange further meetings between his office and Tzu Chi on the proposal to allocate a land for the new school and the plan to register the students under ACE.

He said although it would take some time to build a new school, it is a “dream come true” for Tzu Chi and the students in particular.

The current school (El Menahil International School) was set up by the Sultangazi government, Syrian teachers and Tzu Chi in 2015 and provides classes for all levels of primary, elementary and secondary.

Meanwhile, Lim said Erdogan would consider allowing Top Glove, to build a glove factory in Turkey, that would subsequently provide job opportunities to between 500 and 1,000 individuals.

“We even suggested that maybe a portion of this job openings be provided to the Syrian refugees. And he is very receptive of this proposal,” Lim said.

Tan and Lim are currently on a special three-day mission to Syria, along with 25 Malaysian Tzu Chi volunteers, to provide financial assistance and other aid to the refugees here.

TITLE: Malaysia wants more comprehensive plan on deportation of Rohingya refugees

BANGKOK: Malaysia wants a comprehensive plan on the deportation of ethnic Rohingya refugees to ensure their safety, according to Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah today.

He said Malaysia is committed to helping the Rohingya refugees and is focused on three matters at the 34th Asean Summit here.

“At a dinner attended by Asean foreign ministers yesterday, Malaysia expressed its opinion on the need for the views of the ethnic Rohingya, as well as that of the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) which is doing humanitarian work at Cox’s Bazaar, be sought before the repatriation of the refugees,” he told the Malaysian media after attending the Asean Foreign Minister’s Meeting (AMM), here today.

He said Malaysia wants justice for the ethnic Rohingya and to bring to justice irresponsible parties who violated their rights.

Malaysia is also committed to improving its humanitarian work at Cox’s Bazaar and also the well-being of the ethnic Rohingya refugees in its country, he added.

On the 24-hour operation at the Bukit Kayu Hitam Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security Complex and the Sadao CIQ since last June 18, Saifuddin said it was well-received by the public, but there were several issues that needed to be addressed, especially congestion at the Sadao CIQ. - Bernama

TITLE: Poets to perform online on April 9 to raise fund for refugees

PETALING JAYA: A group of poets from Malaysia as well as other countries will be performing online in an effort to raise funds for refugees during the movement control order (MCO). nan The event – If Walls Could Talk – Poetry Open Mic – aims to raise RM5,000 for non-governmental organisations, Refuge For The Refugees and Tenaganita, that are helping refugees. nan The performances will take place via Facebook Live on Thursday (April 9), starting at 8pm local time. nan Among the Malaysians taking part are Bernice Chauly, Azizan Afi, Deborah Augustin, Dhabitah Zainal, Dhinesha Karthigesu, Gwendoline Esther, Katrina Maliamauv, Kulleh Grasi, Minxi, Veshalini Naidu and Wani Ardy. nan They will be joined by poets from Singapore, Syria, the US, the Philippines and Australia. nan "The majority of refugees depend on daily wages to support themselves and their families. With the MCO in place, many have lost their sources of income and are struggling to put food on the table. nan "We are looking to support more families, and here are the ways your donation can help," read the campaign fundraising page. nan The MCO, which began on March 18, was supposed to end on March 31, but was extended to April 14 and may be extended again. nan Bernama reported that the government would be making an announcement on this on Friday (April 10). nan As of February this year, there were 178,990 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Malaysia. nan Most refugees here work in the informal sectors and live from day to day. nan For more information, log onto https://www.sedunia.me/campaigns/support-refugee-families-during-mco/about

TITLE: Set up cross-cutting council to ensure food security for all

MP SPEAKS | Under Goal 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the right to adequate food is a universal human right that is realised when all people have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or the means for its procurement, without discrimination of any kind.

Shockingly, Selayang Baru in Gombak is now suddenly placed as the seventh lockdown area under an enhanced movement control order (MCO). This adds to the growing fear that people can suddenly find themselves placed under severe restrictions without enough supplies.

ADS

Unfortunately, this has been implemented by invoking Section 18 of the National Security Council (NSC) Act, granting the council-wide and unfettered powers to declare a "state of emergency" in a designated area (also known as security area).

However, to suddenly declare lockdown areas and yet fail to ensure the continued supply of food, as seen in parts of Selayang after it was placed under the enhanced MCO, shows the lack of preparedness of the government to guarantee food security.

Recently I received two requests for aid from residents in Selayang who are in desperate need of food supplies. Residents there are placed under a stressful situation as they are not allowed to leave their homes to buy food and shops were closed without due notice. Many were caught unprepared and do not have enough supplies to last them even for a few days.

ADS

Despite the government’s promise that food will be sent to the area, food delivery was not carried out within 24 hours, leaving many people yet to receive anything.

While I understand the need to act quickly and decisively to isolate particular areas to contain the spread of Covid-19, we must not forget people’s access to food and that they are living in fear because of a lack of information and coordination to guarantee their survival during the enhanced MCO.

There is an urgent need for the government to work together with all parties including NGOs, private sector and elected representatives from all divides to guarantee food access in the designated enhanced MCO areas and also to the vulnerable communities especially the B40 nationwide.

ADS

This enhanced MCO has also brought up several disturbing issues relating to food distribution.

Centralised control over food distribution

The vision of “Shared Prosperity” is seriously tested when aid becomes politicised and food distribution is highly controlled by the government.

It was announced that food baskets will be distributed to each parliamentary constituency for the needy. However, on the ground, it was alleged that the government, through the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, was selective over where the aid was being distributed.

Many Opposition MPs, including myself, hardly received sufficient quantities of essential food items to be distributed to the needy.

The present government had allegedly cut off all Opposition MPs’ development funds when it came into power. I had to seek my own funding to buy food for the vulnerable in my constituency. I am lucky because many generous Malaysians contributed funds and donations in-kind to help those in need in Petaling Jaya.

However, many of the other Opposition MPs, despite having given out food supplies to many themselves, are struggling to cope with the growing requests for food, especially from enhanced MCO lockdown areas.

Lack of transparency on food distribution

Where have all the food baskets gone to? Cheras MP Tan Kok Wai stumbled upon loads of food baskets that were not distributed but stored for more than a week (below).

Recently, Senior Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob denied claims that the value of the government food baskets only came up to RM35, saying that these baskets were from the civil society. Yet, at the same time, he failed to disclose the value of the government’s food baskets, how many were allocated per constituency and to whom they have been given?

Not reaching the deserving poor and marginalised

If the database on who is poor and where they are is available, it would have allowed aid to reach them faster. As civil society, parliamentarians and state assembly representatives struggle to get food on the table for the poor, it is also a stressful process to locate, verify and finally distribute the food.

On many occasions, I stumbled upon people who fell out of the “database” like an elderly woman who depended on her brother who lost his job because of the enhanced MCO, a daily wage-earning single mother who cannot go out to earn money to buy diapers for her paralysed son because of the lockdown, a single mother of seven who struggled to feed her family, and many more.

It also brings up the fact that women suffer the most if they are the single female heads of households.

Migrant workers, refugees and marginalised communities are finding it hard to get food when they are daily wage earners or when employers must stop work due to the enhanced MCO.

I have encountered four migrant workers sharing a single packet of instant noodle a day, while another 200 Bangladesh migrant workers were left to share 100 packets of take-aways between themselves.

I urge the government to take food security and the right to have access to food more seriously and implement the following suggestions:

(i) Decentralise and democratise the distribution of food to allow the Welfare Department to work with parliamentarians, civil society as well as other government agencies to get food quicker to the needy.

(ii) Have an effective, transparent and accessible database so that marginalised communities and the most vulnerable people including the elderly, the disabled and migrant workers do not get left out from receiving aid. This information should be shared right down to the humanitarian groups working on the ground to reduce the possibility of people being left out.

(iii) Utilise the latest technologies such as Big Data, 5G and AI to better coordinate supply chains within industries to help with the manufacturing and production of food, medical supplies and other essential items during the MCO. Build a sustainable domestic food supply in the long run.

(iv) Form a cross-party emergency council made up of professionals and experts in healthcare, social services, investments, banking and food security to build a road map for the implementation of key policies during and post-Covid 19 so that we are better prepared and coordinated for the future.

(v) Activate the Parliament Select Committees to be part of the cross-party emergency council to develop a strategic plan post-Covid-19. The aim is to plan not just for economic recovery and sustainability but to build a more resilient social safety net for all.

Sadly, at times like these, there are Malaysians who are starving and being made to live like in an active warzone without any knowledge of when their situation might change.

For the immediate and in the long term, strategic planning has to start now, otherwise, Malaysia will suffer.

MARIA CHIN ABDULLAH is the Member of Parliament for Petaling Jaya.

The views expressed here are those of the author/contributor and do not necessarily represent the views of Malaysiakini.

Keep up with the latest information on the outbreak in the country with Malaysiakini's free Covid-19 tracker.

Malaysiakini is providing free access to the most important updates on the coronavirus pandemic. You can find them here.

Help keep independent media alive - subscribe to Malaysiakini.

TITLE: Syrian refugee Hassan lands in Canada, granted PR

KUALA LUMPUR: Syrian refugee, Hassan al Kontar will get a new lease of life in Canada after living in Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2 (klia2) for six months.

Hassan who landed in Canada at 10.30am today has been granted permanent resident status under Canada’s “Private Sponsorship of Refugees” (PSR) program, said his lawyer Datuk Seri M. Ramachelvan.

The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program is a Canadian initiative established in 1978 under Operation Lifeline, whereby refugees can resettle in Canada with support and funding from private or joint government-private sponsorship.

Al Kontar’s Canadian legal representative Andrew Brouwer could not be reached for comments.

Al Kontar had on Monday posted a video on Twitter from the Taiwan International Airport that he was on his way to Vancouver, Canada.

“For now, it’s not important where I have been or what went on ... What is important is today and tomorrow. The present and the future,“ he said on Twitter.

“I could not do it without the support and prayers from all of you. I could not do it without the help of my family, my Canadian friend’s family, my lawyer. Thank you all,“ he added.

Al-Kontar was arrested at the klia2 almost seven months after being stranded when officials refused to let him board a flight to Ecuador, on March 7.

The 36-year-old was left stranded in the terminal, surviving on donated airline meals and washing up in the toilets.

Al-Kontar, reportedly sought by authorities in his homeland for failing to serve in the military, was also refused entry into Cambodia and not allowed back into Malaysia due to visa issues.

TITLE: Rohingyas urged to get tested

PETALING JAYA: Rohingya leaders have been spreading the message for the community to be tested for the Covid-19 virus after 2,000 of them were said to have attended the tabligh gathering at Masjid Jamek in Sri Petaling. nan nan nan They disputed the figure, saying that at most hundreds could have attended the event. nan nan nan Rohingya Society of Malaysia (RSM) president Bo Ning Maing said a voice and video message has been shared with the community via the WhatsApp messaging application and on Facebook, urging those concerned to go for the test. nan nan nan “Many in the community are unable to read and write, so this is the most effective way to get the message across,” he added. nan nan nan As of February, there were 101,010 Rohingya refugee and asylum seekers registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Malaysia. nan nan nan Rafik Shah Ismail, a Rohingya community leader with the Human Aid Selangor Society, said he got to know that only several members of the community attended the event. nan nan nan “I’m not sure how the big number came about because most of our community cannot afford to take a day off from work,” he said. nan nan nan He added that he had gone door-to-door to send flyers to the community in Gombak on the importance of getting tested for the virus. nan nan nan He said some of them had self-quarantined themselves. nan nan nan Meanwhile, the UNHCR has set up Covid-19 hotlines in six different languages to help refugees and asylum seekers who may not be able to access the national crisis hotlines. nan nan nan It urged those with symptoms to get tested at government hospitals. nan nan nan nan nan Article type: metered User Type: anonymous web User Status: Campaign ID: 1 Cxense type: free User access status: 0 nan Subscribe now to our Premium Plan for an ad-free and unlimited reading experience!

TITLE: BBC drama filmed in Malaysia slammed for exploiting Rohingya refugees hired as extras

PETALING JAYA, Jan 22 — British broadcaster the BBC has come under fire for the reported mistreatment of Rohingya refugees who were hired as extras for a popular TV series that is currently being filmed in Malaysia. The military drama called Our Girl follows the adventures of female medics in the British Army. It is understood that the controversial scenes were filmed for the show’s fourth series, which is slated to air in the United Kingdom in April. UK’s The Sun reported sources as claiming the show’s producers hired about 100 Rohingya refugees as extras for just £33 (RM180) a day. Sources also told the tabloid that the refugees were “forced to relive their nightmares” when they were asked to participate in “horrific scenes.” The allegations included being asked to dig “graves” in a real rubbish dump as well as extras collapsing from heat exhaustion after being made to work 12 hours a day. It was also claimed that the extras were “sprayed with an industrial gun to make them look filthy” before they were asked to wade through a river with “terrified babies and children in their arms”. An extra named as Habibah Abdullah who spent 15 days at sea after fleeing Myanmar recounted her on-set experience with her two-year-old daughter to The Sun. Habibah who cannot swim was quoted as saying: “We were in fast-moving water and I was terrified. It took hours to do the scenes and we had to go into the water again and again. “Babies were crying and children all around me were screaming ‘Mummy, mummy.’” Meanwhile, another extra Mubarak Bindi who fled Myanmar after her village was razed to the ground said filming scenes in a replica of a refugee camp brought back “terrible feelings”. “My heart sank when I saw the film set. It reminded me of where I had to live after my village was burned down. “It brought back all the terrible feelings of that time. I felt very upset,” she was quoted as saying by The Sun. Sources told The Sun tabloid that many of the show’s cast and crew were “furious” with the treatment of the “vulnerable” refugees on the set, including its star Michelle Keegan. In a statement to The Sun, a spokesman for the BBC refuted the allegations and said the refugees were paid the standard local rate. The rep for the British broadcaster added that the Our Girl storyline was conceived to shed a light on the plight of the Rohingya. “All the supporting artists were contracted in the normal manner and at rates standard for work in Malaysia, including some Rohingya refugees living in Malaysia. “At no point were any of the artists asked to do anything that would compromise their safety and their welfare was of paramount importance to us,” the spokesman said. The spokesman also addressed the case of the Rohingya extra who collapsed from heat exhaustion, saying that he was attended to by an on-set medic and taken to hospital with a producer. “Filming stopped to allow this to happen and there is no footage of the event in the programme,” he added. Since August 2017, nearly 650,000 Rohingya have fled a military operation in Myanmar’s westernmost Rakhine state described by the UN and US as “ethnic cleansing”. Statistics provided by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees last November showed that there are currently more than 60,000 Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.

TITLE: Home Ministry to meet UNHCR, Wisma Putra over refugee card holders

PUTRAJAYA: The Home Ministry will meet the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Wisma Putra so that they can coordinate data on UNHCR card holders. nan “I will call both to ensure that they forward whatever data they have to us. This is to ensure that whoever is in our country has valid documentation,” said Home Minister Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin after a promotion ceremony at the ministry here on Friday (Aug 14). nan Previously in Parliament, the minister said that the government will review the status of refugees who are residing in Malaysia using the UNHCR cards. nan “The UNCHR cards used by them are something that we do not comprehend sometimes; the figure (the number of UNHCR card holders) is supposed to have remained static, but it has increased over time,” said Hamzah in his winding-up speech in Parliament on Aug 4. nan “That is causing a problem in the country, as raised by Arau (Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim). We will leave this to Wisma Putra, and we will review their status in our country,” he added. nan “They are also humans we should help, I agree with that. But let them have legitimate documents that we can accept, ” Hamzah also said during his winding-up speech. nan Earlier on Friday, Datuk Seri Acryl Sani Abdullah Sani was officially promoted to be the Deputy Inspector-General of Police in a ceremony witnessed by both the minister and Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Bador. nan He replaces Datuk Mazlan Mansor, who officially retired on Friday.

TITLE: ‘Long Tiger' was looking to flee to neighbouring country, say police

JOHOR BARU: The capture of an ethnic Rohingya man known as “Long Tiger” came at the nick of time with the fugitive making plans to escape to a neighbouring country. nan Outgoing Johor police chief Comm Datuk Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay said that investigations so far showed that the fugitive, Abdul Hamim Ab Hamid, 32, who is currently under remand until Jan 1, wanted to flee Malaysia. nan He added that other than the arrests of Abdul Hamim and his 46-year-old male accomplice in Kedah on Tuesday (Dec 28) at around 3.15pm, police also arrested two male suspects aged 36 and 38, in Batu Pahat in the wee hours of Wednesday (Dec 29) morning. nan “Long Tiger knew the accomplice whom he met through Facebook and became friends with last year. nan “The other two suspects assisted him by buying him a mobile SIM card and cutting off his handcuffs. We seized the handcuffs and an iron cutter from them,” he said, adding that one of the suspects has a criminal record. nan Comm Ayob said this in a press conference held at the state police headquarters here on Wednesday. nan He also said police were investigating how Abdul Hamim managed to escape from the Tangkak Magistrate Court on Dec 15 and make his way to Sungai Petani in Kedah, which is more than 500km away. nan Comm Ayob, however, admitted that it was the carelessness from the police in the first place which allowed the main suspect to escape from the lock-up. nan He said the four policemen who were accompanying Abdul Hamim at the time have since been suspended while the Tangkak OCPD and Tangkak police station chief would be referred to Bukit Aman for disciplinary action as well. nan “Police are also opening up an investigation paper after pictures of Abdul Hamim's arrest went viral on social media, as it will tamper with our investigations. nan “We are also investigating a Facebook account belonging to a former policeman from Klang which uploaded the pictures on social media,” he said, adding that the case was being investigated under Section 233 of the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998. nan Comm Ayob warned that police would take action against anyone including senior police officers if they were found to leak such information to the public. nan On Tuesday, police arrested Abdul Hamim almost two weeks after he escaped from the Magistrate’s Court lock-up in Tangkak. nan On Dec 15, Abdul Hamim escaped through the main entrance of the Tangkak courthouse at around noon before his hearing. nan He was picked up from the Sungai Udang Prison in Melaka a day before the incident and brought to attend the court session for a case under Section 388 of the Penal Code (for extortion). nan Police personnel only realised he escaped after seeing him running out of the door towards the gate. nan They, along with court security guards, ran after the suspect but he managed to flee towards the woods. nan The suspect also has an ongoing hearing at the Muar Sessions Court for rape under Section 376 of the Penal Code. nan Abdul Hamim was picked up in Muar on July 12 after he allegedly locked up a 21-year-old local said to be his former worker. nan On April 28, he was detained at his home in Muar after he allegedly made a slanderous statement against a police officer from the Tangkak police headquarters. nan A 27-year-old Corporal from the Muar police department, who allegedly spread videos of Abdul Hamim's arrest on social media, was arrested and investigated under the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. nan In 2012, Abdul Hamim was charged under Sections 363 and 376 of the Penal Code for kidnapping and rape. nan In 2009, he was convicted under Section 506 of the Penal Code for criminal intimidation. nan The suspect has temporary resident status, as well as a refugee card issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

TITLE: Iraqi man held over African woman’s murder

KUALA LUMPUR: A 25-year-old Iraqi man was held on Sunday night in connection with the murder of an African woman who was found dead by a road shoulder on Jalan Memanda 2, near Ampang Point about 12 hour earlier.

Ampang Jaya police chief ACP Mohamad Farouk Eshak said the Iraqi who has refugee status under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was arrested at Ampang Putra near Ampang Jaya here at 11.20pm.

He said a knife believed to be the murder weapon was also recovered.

Mohamad Farouk said the suspect and the 28-year-old victim were colleagues and worked at an Arab restaurant.

He said investigations are ongoing to ascertain what had led to the suspect and victim to be embroiled in a fight which led to the death of the latter.

Mohamad Farouk said police learnt that the African woman had come to Malaysia with her family about nine years ago.

“We managed to solve the case within a day with the arrest of the Iraqi. The suspect is in our custody for the murder investigation under a seven-day remand order,“ he said.

Mohamad Farouk said a post mortem on the victim’s body is ongoing at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital but an initial report revealed that tests showed the woman was positive for Covid-19.

He urged those with information on the case to come forward to assist in the probe.

On Sunday at about 12pm, police were alerted to the murder by a paramedic who had rendered medical aid to the victim who was found by a road shoulder opposite a row of shophouses.

The case was initially thought to have resulted from a snatch theft but investigators discovered that the victim was engaged in a fight with a man prior to being attacked and killed.

TITLE: Malaysia to review use of UNHCR cards for Rohingya refugees

LARUT: The issuance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) cards to Rohingya refugees in the country will be reviewed, says Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin. nan The Home Minister said a study had to be done following the escape of hundreds of Rohingya detainees from the Sungai Bakap immigration detention depot near Bandar Baharu, Kedah, on Wednesday.“We cannot provide space for them to easily enter the country without documents and immediately get UNHCR cards. nan “It’s not right ... that’s why we take a firm stance – being a card holder doesn’t mean they can live in our country and enter as they like,” he told reporters after handing over donations to 1,000 underprivileged people from Larut parliamentary constituency at Dewan Astaka Batu Kurau here yesterday, Bernama reported. nan In the 4.30am incident on Wednesday, 528 Rohingya detainees escaped from the depot following a riot. nan During the escape, six detainees, including two children, were killed on the south-bound side of the North-South Expressway when they tried to cross the highway near Jawi. nan In Alor Setar, Kedah police chief Comm Wan Hassan Wan Ahmad said the police were still tracking down the remaining 80 Rohingya escapees. nan “As of Friday night, 65 men, eight women and seven girls are still at large,” he said. nan “So far, 448 Rohingya detainees have been found – they comprise 229 men, 89 women, 69 boys and 61 girls,” he said in a statement yesterday. nan Comm Wan Hassan said currently, there were 15 people at the depot and documentation work was being conducted to transfer them to other detention depots.

TITLE: Lockdown in Masjid India: Foreign missions told to provide for their citizens

CORONAVIRUS | Foreign missions have been told to provide meals for the vast majority of residents in the Selangor Mansion and Malayan Mansion buildings in Kuala Lumpur, which have been placed under total lockdown.

Defence Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said 97 percent of the 6,000 affected were migrants.

"I have said it clearly before, migrants in our country are the responsibility of their respective embassies (and high commissions)," he told a press conference in Putrajaya today.

The lockdown on the two buildings in Jalan Masjid India was announced yesterday after 19 Covid-19 positive cases were detected in the premises.

ADS

Currently, the government provides Malaysians under the enhanced movement control order (MCO) with essentials.

According to Ismail, migrants under the enhanced MCO can also purchase essentials by placing orders at the operations centre enforcing the lockdown.

The senior minister had announced last week that all foreign missions were responsible for distributing aid to their citizens in Malaysia.

There are reportedly some six million migrant workers in Malaysia according to unofficial estimates.

ADS

It is unclear if the directive meant that embassies must also look after refugees, or if the Malaysian government would be helping them.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), there are some 178,990 refugees and asylum seekers registered with it in Malaysia as of February.

This includes some 101,010 Rohingyas who are effectively stateless due to Myanmar's refusal to grant them citizenship.

Keep up with the latest information on the outbreak in the country with Malaysiakini's free Covid-19 tracker.

Malaysiakini is providing free access to the most important updates on the coronavirus pandemic. You can find them here.

Help keep independent media alive - subscribe to Malaysiakini.

TITLE: Malaysia puts deportations to Myanmar on hold till after Asean meets, say sources

KUALA LUMPUR, March 24 — Malaysia decided today to postpone planned deportations to Myanmar until after a proposed emergency regional summit to discuss the crisis there brought on by a military coup, sources familiar with the matter told Reuters. Right groups raised concerns over the safety of deportees when Malaysia sent back 1,086 Myanmar nationals on Myanmar navy ships last month, just weeks after the military had seized power in a February 1 coup. Detained in Malaysia for immigration offences, they were deported despite a court order halting the plan. Rights groups had told the court that children and asylum-seekers fleeing persecution in Myanmar were among those being deported. Three Malaysian sources familiar with the matter said the decision to delay a plan to deport a second batch until after a proposed meeting of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (Asean) to discuss the Myanmar crisis was taken at a cabinet meeting today. The sources requested anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to media. Myanmar this month had offered to send three more navy ships to pick up its people detained in Malaysia, one of the sources said. Malaysia’s foreign ministry directed queries to the home affairs ministry and immigration department, neither of which responded to requests for comment. Indonesia last week called on Brunei, the current chair of Asean, to convene an urgent meeting to discuss the situation in Myanmar, amid a violent crackdown on anti-coup protesters. Malaysia backed Indonesia’s call, but it is unclear whether, or when, that meeting would be held. Malaysia came under international pressure after sending back the Myanmar nationals last month, with diplomats saying Kuala Lumpur was legitimising the coup by accepting the junta’s proposal to take back the detainees. Malaysia said the people deported last month were undocumented migrants and did not include ethnic Rohingya refugees or asylum-seekers. But concerns have persisted as the UN refugee agency has been denied access to detainees for more than a year to verify their status. — Reuters

TITLE: Vaccine-preventable diseases can be controlled if carried out diligently, says paediatrician

PETALING JAYA: Vaccine-preventable diseases can be controlled if vaccinations are done proactively regardless of a child’s nationality, a paediatrician pointed out yesterday.

Datuk Dr Amar Singh, a senior consultant paediatrician, said polio made a comeback in the country after 12 years because refugees, undocumented children, immigrants and stateless children were not all immunised.

“The real problem in Sabah lies in the fact that we don’t vaccinate these quarters, or rather they are charged money ... if I am not mistaken, RM40 per vaccination,” he said.

“If you are stateless or someone from that category, you won’t have the means to pay that amount of money. That is the problem. If you don’t vaccinate other children, we will harm our own children.

“This is because we create an environment where a sizeable number of stateless and immigrant children are not immunised.”

Amar said the Health Ministry had announced that it would work with other agencies and obtain funds from the Philippines.

“But no, I think we should invest our own money because this is an investment for our own children,” he added.

Similarly, another physician suggested several “stepwise approaches” to provide essential healthcare to non-citizens in Malaysia.

Dr Tharani Loganathan said mothers and children should be given access to immunisation programmes, maternal and childcare services, and hospital delivery in public health facilities.

“Provide health insurance for all non-citizens, including undocumented migrants,” he said.

“Decouple healthcare from immigration so that non-citizens are able to seek care at medical facilities without fear or financial costs.”

TITLE: Suhakam to monitor GE14 integrity

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 10 — The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) said today it will monitor the 14th general election to ensure the process is in accordance with democratic standards. In conjunction with International Human Rights Day, Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Razali Ismail raised several pertinent matters related to the state of human rights in the country and said that monitoring the election will be one of its roles to fulfil people’s rights. “Suhakam will be monitoring closely how it (the elections) will be conducted on the premise that democracy must exist with election integrity,” he said in a statement. Razali added that there were many aspects and challenges to human rights which Putrajaya has yet to address. From the issues of indigenous people and uncontrolled deforestation by developers to enacting laws without consulting relevant stakeholders like Suhakam and the spread of bigotry in the country, Razali said more needs to be done to promote national harmony. “In the context of refugee protection, in particular the Rohingya, Suhakam is pleased that Malaysia has displayed the political will, and to a certain extent shaped international response authoritatively. “However, at home we continue to hold refugee children in detention; often in prison-like conditions,” he said. Nevertheless, Razali said Suhakam will continue to encourage the government to broaden the search for solutions to address these issues. “The ultimate solution is to address and ameliorate drivers of displacement for such as conflict, breakdown of the rule of law, weak governance and the failure of legal institutions,” he added. The world celebrates the 69th Human Rights Day today.

TITLE: Umno veep: Help refugees obtain papers, let them work

Umno vice-president Khaled Nordin today opined that Malaysia must improve in its treatment of refugees.

He said refugees should be allowed to register with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and be given freedoms, including the freedom to work.

"We don't have to import millions of unskilled labourers through various complicated deals. These refugees can be put to work.

"This will allow them to develop skills, sustain themselves and reduce the burden on the government," he said in a statement today.

ADS

Political opinions on the better treatment of refugees are rare among Umno leaders.

Successive BN governments had never ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. The only Asean country that is a signatory is the Philippines.

As such, under Malaysian law, refugees have neither legal recognition nor UNHCR-issue identification cards, which can help refugees resettle in other countries.

The detention centre where the breakout occurred

Malaysia's treatment of refugees has come under the spotlight once again following the escape of 528 undocumented persons from a detention centre in Kedah.

ADS

Six people - including women and children - died while escaping.

According to Home Minister Hamzah Zainudin, all the detainees were from the Rohingya ethnic group and had been in detention since 2020.

Khaled said unrest at immigration detention centres is not new, suggesting that it had likely to do with the conditions and the long duration of detention.

"Prolonged detention without any clarity on their future is a violation of human rights.

"It’s also a waste of public funds," he added.

TITLE: Refugees lack access to mental health professionals, UNHCR says

Lack of access to mental health professionals is a major issue for refugees, said the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Malaysia.

In a statement to Malaysiakini following Tuesday's murder-suicide involving a refugee family in Kepong, Kuala Lumpur, the humanitarian agency said the problem was usually due to financial constraints and lack of awareness.

“Refugees who have gone through forced displacement often face psychological stress from experiences in countries of origin, transit country, and in the country of asylum.

“Maintaining mental health is crucial to the overall wellbeing of individuals. In refugee settings, lack of access to mental health professionals is often a major issue, due to financial constraints and lack of awareness.

ADS

“It is also compounded by the lack of specialised expertise in the country dealing with the mental health needs of refugees that arise from their unique circumstances,” said spokesperson Yante Ismail.

Malaysiakini contacted UNHCR Malaysia for comments on the incident early Tuesday morning, which saw two Myanmar children killed while another sibling was seriously injured after they were thrown from a flyover by their father, who then plunged to his death from the same spot.

It was later revealed that the father, 38, had been suffering from depression for about a year after he was unable to find employment and was infected with Covid-19.

Seek support from UNHCR partners

ADS

Factors contributing to suicide are often complex, and mental health problems do not necessarily lead to suicide.

Although a serious public health problem, suicides are preventable with timely, evidence-based, and often low-cost interventions, according to the World Health Organization.

Yante said refugees in Malaysia can access mental health and psychosocial support services that are provided by UNHCR NGO partners here.

They include the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, Health Equity Initiatives, Acts, Humankind, and the QFFD Clinic run by Mercy Malaysia.

Those who wish to engage in the services can find their contact information via UNHCR’s RefugeeMalaysia.org information portal or by clicking here.

According to Yante, UNHCR also has an online psychosocial support group project with the University of New South Wales (UNSW) for refugee women.

They may seek assistance on matters concerning their mental health and emotional well-being, especially in a time of Covid-19.

If you are feeling depressed or suicidal, or know someone who is, please call the following hotlines:

ADS

Talian Kasih

Hotline: 15999

The Befrienders

Hotline: 03-76272929

Agape Counselling Centre Malaysia

Hotline: 03-77855955 or 03-77810800

Life Line Association Malaysia

Hotline: 03-42657995

The Health Ministry and Mercy Malaysia have also set up a support line for frontline workers and others who are emotionally affected by the Covid-19 outbreak.

The line can be reached at 014-3223392, 011-63996482, 011-63994236, or 03-29359935, from 8am to 5pm.

TITLE: Malaysia to absorb 56k Rohingya refugees in the country into semi-skilled workforce

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is committed to assist the 56,000 Rohingya refugees currently residing in the country by absorbing them into the semi-skilled workforce.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said such effort would allow ethnic Rohingyas with UNHCR cards to become an asset to the nation, rather than becoming a liability.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also the Home Minister, said the government is currently in the midst of scrutinising the plan to allow for Rohingya refugees to be able to work legally in Malaysia.

"They will be given training in the semi-skill sector and we will scrutinise the implementation to provide them with work opportunity.

"These UNHCR card holders will be given the temporary foreign work permit (PLKS), and their status can be changed from a liability to an asset to our workforce," he told reporters at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation extraordinary session at the KL Convention Centre here.

Ahmad Zahid said the plan was part of the government's commitment to alleviate the hardship faced by the refugees in Malaysia.

Deputy Home Minister Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed on Jan 7 had stated that a pilot project is underway to allow ethnic Rohingyas with UNHCR cards to be employed.

Meanwhile, Ahmad Zahid said Malaysia is yet to receive a green light from the Myanmar government to dock its humanitarian flotilla at the troubled Rakhine State.

This was despite news reports stating that the Myanmar authorities had agreed verbally to allow the mission to take place, although with conditions.

"Not yet, not yet. Of course if it (permission) is granted we will welcome Myanmar's commitment," he said.

Ahmad Zahid said Malaysia is still negotiating with its Myanmar counterpart to allow the mission to enter through Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State.

TITLE: Bangladesh picks up 58 Malaysia-bound Rohingya at sea

TEKNAF (Bangladesh), May 31 — Bangladesh coast guards yesterday stopped 58 Rohingya refugees from making a potentially dangerous journey to Malaysia by sea and arrested two suspected traffickers, an official said. Acting on a tip-off, a patrol ship challenged a fishing boat near Saint Martin’s, a small Bangladesh island in the Bay of Bengal, and found the Rohingya on board, coast guard Lieutenant Josel Rana said. “We’ve found 58 refugees and detained two human traffickers on the boat,” he told AFP. About 740,000 Muslim minority Rohingya have fled Myanmar for Bangladesh since a brutal military crackdown in the Buddhist-majority nation began in August 2017. Thousands of refugees attempt to flee the camps each year in pursuit of better opportunities in countries such as Malaysia and Thailand. So far this year, law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh have rescued over 400 Rohingya refugees from coastal villages as they were waiting to board boats bound for Malaysia. But this is the first time in 2019 that Rohingya refugees were rescued at sea, raising concerns that the situation in Bangladesh’s overcrowded camps — home to nearly one million — is worsening. “Such incidents will continue as desperation among the refugees is on the rise,” said Emdadul Haq, a professor at the private North South University in Dhaka. Rana said most of the refugees picked up by the coast guard were from the Kutupalong camp — the largest refugee settlement in the world. Most attempt the journey before March, when the sea is calm before the monsoon season sets in, but experts say traffickers are now convincing the refugees to attempt the trip even in rough waters. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) has said the vulnerability of Rohingya to trafficking has increased enormously as livelihoods, support networks, and other fundamental systems are disrupted. — AFP

TITLE: Inhumane to turn back refugee ship

Human rights group Suaram has criticised Malaysia's decision to turn away a refugee ship, calling the move "inhumane".

"Malaysia’s act of turning those boats back to sea without good cause endangering the lives of the 200 passengers aboard is inhumane in the extreme.

"We agree that problems arising from military conflicts, nationality and the status of ethnic Rohingyas or any other ethnic minority in Asean are a collective responsibility requiring the cooperation of other Asean nations.

"Regardless, Malaysia should have set a progressive example for other Asean nations in defending basic human rights in the region," Suaram executive director D Sevan said in a statement.

ADS

On April 16, the Royal Malaysian Navy prevented a boat carrying an estimated 200 Rohingya refugees from entering Malaysian waters near Langkawi.

A day before that, it was reported that at least two dozen people had died after a ship carrying 382 Rohingya refugees was repeatedly turned back by Malaysian authorities.

They were eventually rescued by the Bangladeshi coastguard, which said they had been adrift for two months.

Sevan noted concerns that the refugees may be infected with Covid-19 but said that can be addressed.

ADS

"With screening procedures and social distancing, they can still be saved without jeopardising Malaysia’s public health.

"For example, Cuba has allowed two ships carrying Covid-19 positive passengers to dock in their waters to receive medical assistance, reasoning that health is a human right," he said.

D Sevan

Sevan said refugees in Malaysia are not recognised by the government even though they have a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) identification card.

"They do not enjoy rights to work, receive a formal education, nor ready access to public healthcare services.

"Despite these constraints, they still need to sustain themselves and their families, often leading to problems with the authorities. This further complicates their daily lives.

"Refugees are not recipients of benefits or favours from the government but are instead victims caught in a situation beyond their control," he said.

As such, he urged the government to be humane and show empathy to those trying to flee from cruelty and suffering.

TITLE: 'Help Rohingya? Give them formal status in Malaysia'

The Malaysian government can help the Rohingya community by recognising and helping those who are already in Malaysia, said former PKR deputy president Syed Husin Ali.

"If we truly want to help the Rohingya, then recognise their status here. Give their children a chance to be educated," he said on Twitter.

This comes after at least 10,000 people, including Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, attended a rally in Kuala Lumpur to protest against state-sanctioned violence against Rohingya community in Myanmar.

Similarly, PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail said the government must first recognise the community as refugees of war.

ADS

She said Malaysia must also use its position as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council to press for an emergency motion against the killings.

Malaysia as Asean founder member must also lead the way to pressure Myanmar and do away with Asean's non-interference policy, she said in a statement.

"It is insufficient to merely voice out our sympathies to the Rohingya cause, but we must also employ our positions and responsibilities," she said.

The Rohingya community, who are mostly Muslim, are not recognised as Myanmar citizens despite their presence in the country for several generations.

ADS

They originate from the coastal state of Rakhine, east of the Bay of Bengal.

According to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, there are 54,856 registered Rohingya refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia as of the end of October.

Refugees are not formally recognised in Malaysia, leaving them vulnerable to human traffickers, labour exploitation and extortion.

Children of refugees are also not allowed to attend government schools and are mostly educated by volunteers.

Transit point

Despite not recognising refugees, Malaysia has become a transit point for refugees, who are processed and transferred in third countries by agencies such as the UNHCR.

Last year Malaysia turned away boats carrying migrants including the Rohingya, but eventually took in 1,018 aboard a boat which tried to dock at Pulau Langkawi.

The boat was among several packed with economic migrants and refugees, who were left at sea by human traffickers following a crackdown in Thailand.

This followed the discovery of mass graves linked to human trafficking on the Thai-Malaysian border.

The 1,018, reportedly from Bangladesh and Myanmar, were placed in the Belantik immigration detention camp in Sik, Kedah.

Last May, 36 of those held at Belantik were transferred to the United States with the help of the UNHCR.

TITLE: Rohingya paid agents to enter country, get UNHCR cards, says Immigration DG

THE Immigration Department has found that some Rohingya have entered the country using the services of agents who would also take them to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office to obtain the refugee card.

Immigration director-general Khairul Dzaimee Daud said the matter would be scrutinised by a committee at the Home Ministry for further action.

“I had the chance to speak to some Rohingya UNHCR card holders (in the operation) yesterday. They confessed that they entered Malaysia through the borders of Kedah and Kelantan from Thailand and admitted that it was managed by agents,” he told reporters after the operation at a housing project site in Kubang Menerong, Tasek Gelugor early this morning.

“They also confessed that the agents managed trips to the UNHCR office in Kuala Lumpur for the process of obtaining the card.

“They (Rohingya) did not purchase the (UNHCR) cards, but they paid the agent between RM5,000 and RM7,000 per person, and the agent would take them to the UNHCR office.

“They thought that they purchased the cards but actually, they paid the agents in managing their entry.”

During the raid, the department inspected 36 foreigners working at the site and detained 25 of them, including a woman, for not having travel documents and overstaying.

Khairul said those arrested in the operation that started at 11.15pm consisted of 10 Bangladeshi men, eight Indonesian men, five Myanmar men and one Nepalese man and woman.

“All the foreigners have been taken to the detention depot for further investigation because some of them are suspected of using fake UNHCR cards,” he said.

Khairul said the operation was the 261st successful one carried out by the Penang Immigration Department so far this year, and 193 foreigners and 32 employers were detained for various offences during the period, involving a compound amount of more than RM2.5 million. – Bernama, September 17, 2022.

TITLE: 601 foreigners tested positive, says Health DG

PUTRAJAYA: A total of 601 foreigners have tested positive for Covid-19, says Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah. nan “Of this, 356 are being treated, 242 have recovered, while there were three deaths, ” he said yesterday. nan He said they comprised mainly of Indonesians, Filipinos, Bangladeshis, Indians and Pakistanis, all of whom were either migrant workers, tourists, asylum seekers or refugees. nan He said the authorities took note of the recent situation in Singapore, where a spike in Covid-19 cases was due to spread of the virus at workers’ dormitories. nan “We must heed this situation in view that Malaysia also has a lot of foreign workers. nan “Steps must be taken to prevent the spread of the virus among foreigners, ” he said. nan He also noted that more than half of total infections in Singapore was due to the recent spike among foreign workers. nan Dr Noor Hisham said industries that rely on foreign workers were responsible to ensure that all health and safety measures were implemented at the workplace. nan He said the ministry was also working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers were covered under the government’s Covid-19 control and preventive activities. nan On Malaysians returning from abroad, Dr Noor Hisham said only 10 tested positive, out of the 15,000 placed under mandatory quarantine since returning to the country from April 3 onwards.

TITLE: Journalists in Asean should share views on regional issues, says Fahmi

JAKARTA: Malaysian and Indonesian journalists need to discuss regional issues that can impact both countries, including the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, says Communications and Digital Minister Fahmi Fadzil (pic). nan He said on Monday (Feb 6) he believed that such discussions through, for example, a forum at the Asean level involving journalists in the region would help raise questions and improve understanding of the issues. nan "I would like to see journalists participate in discussions about what is going on and the challenges in their countries, as well as what can be learned and how to support each other,” he said in an online interview with Indonesian media in conjunction with Indonesia’s National Journalist Day this Thursday (Feb 9). nan Even though Asean holds to the principle of non-intervention in member countries' internal matters, he said the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar had become too sensitive an issue to even talk about, he added. nan According to Fahmi, Rohingya refugees in Malaysia have become an issue as their numbers have swelled to the hundreds of thousands. nan "If possible we should form closer ties... among (all) journalists (in the region), who play an important role in sharing stories that we all read,” he said. nan Another matter he touched upon was the challenge in an era where social media had become a major way to spread both information and fake news. nan On Malaysia-Indonesia ties, Fahmi said Ikatan Setiakawan Wartawan Malaysia-Indonesia (Iswami) could play a bigger role in strengthening bilateral relations. nan He said there were several programmes being planned, including a journalist exchange, to boost interaction and allow media practitioners to experience the situation in both countries. – Bernama

TITLE: Guan Eng launches campaign to entice volunteers in Penang cleanup efforts

GEORGE TOWN: Penang has launched a campaign to entice volunteers to sign up for a massive "gotong-royong" campaign to enable the state to bounce back from the devastating rain storm and floods.

Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng launched the campaign both on the island and mainland sides with a clarion call to the young and the able to help those aggrieved by the floods to get back on their feet.

He said that there were many obstacles in the way due to the sheer after effects of the floods; from debris and mud leftovers to stalled cars and fallen trees besides the financial losses incurred by the victims.

Last weekend's floods inundated 80% of Penang, and caused at one time up to 9,000 people to be resettled in some 400 flood relief centres.

But with generally good weather over the last seven days, there is a sense of normalcy returning to Penang although there is a weather forecast predicting thunderstorms in many parts of the country.

As of 9am, 566 people from 147 families remained marooned in four relief centres where among the hardest hit was SK Lahar Looi in Tasek Gelugor where the 300 primary schoolchildren lost literally everything – textbooks, stationaries and their classrooms were badly damaged.

The school principal Mohamad Asri said the school welcomes any aid to help ease the burden faced by the families of the students.

Civil societies were up in full force to dispense aid to the victims and to help in the clean up for the worst floods to inundate Penang in decades.

Among those out doing a job, was the national aid group – Mercy Malaysia, who besides offering free healthcare services, are also rounding up volunteers to help in the clean up of homes.

The Centre to Combat Corruption Corruption & Cronyism (C4 Center) northern region coordinator K. Sudhagaran Stanley also pointed out that the floods had not only disrupted the lives of the local residents but foreigners as well.

Stanley said that among those worst hit were the Burmese Rohingya refugees, who have been granted temporary residences here by the United Nations Commission on Refugees.

Stanley said their temporary quarters in Butterworth, was damaged by the surging flood waters.

"It is a double whammy for them. First, they have lost their homes in their homeland of Myanmar and here, they have suffered damages to their temporary homes. Their plight needs attention," said Stanley.

He too welcomes any aid which can come in handy for those affected.

He also reminded the state government that the flood waters do not differentiate – it inundates everybody's home in its path.

TITLE: Bangladesh says Rohingya refugees can’t leave island

DHAKA, July 9 — Hundreds of Rohingya refugees on a flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal will not be allowed to leave unless they agree to return home, Bangladesh authorities said today. The 306 Muslim Rohingya from Myanmar were put on Bhashan Char island in April after being taken off two boats trying to traffic them to Malaysia. Their plight has been taken up by the United Nations, an international rights group and community leaders, who want them moved to more established refugee camps on the mainland. “They will stay at Bhasan Char until they are repatriated to Myanmar,” Mohammed Khorshed Alam Khan, administrator for the district covering the island, told AFP. He said the refugees are well taken care of and have better facilities than in the overcrowded camps in Cox’s Bazar where 700,000 Rohingya fled in 2017 to escape a Myanmar military clampdown. In April, Bangladesh authorities said the Rohingya would be kept on the island in order to stop the spread of coronavirus in the sprawling refugee camps. But Human Rights Watch (HRW) questioned that motivation, and said the refugees were not being treated well. “Bangladesh authorities are using the pandemic as an excuse to detain refugees on a spit of land in the middle of a churning monsoon sea while their families anxiously pray for their return,” said Brad Adams, the organisation’s Asia representative. He also asked why Bangladesh authorities were not giving aid workers access to the island settlement. A Rohingya leader from the Cox’s Bazar camps said relatives of those on the island wanted to hold talks with Bangladesh’s refugee commissioner. “We request the authorities to send our children to our families,” said Mohib Ullah, head of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, which lobbies for the Rohingya. HRW said it had received reports that refugees on Bhashan Char had little freedom of movement or adequate access to food, safe water and medical care. A government official involved with the case rejected the criticism, but admitted some refugees wanted to be reunited with their families. — AFP

TITLE: Govt to conduct in-depth study on employment plan for refugees

The Human Resources Ministry and Home Ministry are carrying out an in-depth study of a plan to create job opportunities for refugees in the country due to security factors.

Human Resources Minister M Saravanan said a detailed review was important to prevent more refugees from coming to Malaysia if the plan to create job opportunities was implemented.

"I have discussed with (Home Minister Hamzah Zainudin) regarding the security factor, where the Home Ministry is worried that if we allow (the creation of employment opportunities) without proper planning, then many more refugees might head to Malaysia.

"So, we must study in detail in terms of implementation. For now, (we) still do not have a decision,” he told a media conference after the Perkeso 2022 breaking of the fast ceremony in Kuala Lumpur last night.

ADS

Saravanan was commenting on the incident where 528 detainees escaped from the Sungai Bakap Immigration Detention Depot at about 4.30am yesterday.

As of 8pm yesterday, a total of 351 refugees had been rearrested and police are still tracking down the remaining escaped detainees.

Six others were killed after being hit by a vehicle while crossing the road at KM 168 of the North-South Expressway (Plus) heading south near Jawi, Penang.

- Bernama

TITLE: Rohingya refugees land in Myanmar as escape boat breaks up

YANGON: Scores of Rohingya refugees leaving Bangladeshi camps by boat have accidentally returned to the crisis-hit area of Myanmar they originally fled from, after their vessel broke up on the sea route south.

Around one million Rohingya have fled Myanmar army crackdowns since 2016 for Bangladesh, where they live in cramped, flood-prone camps now being battered by the seasonal monsoon.

On Monday morning a boat carrying 104 Bangladeshis and Rohingya ran into trouble off the coast of Rakhine state, a Myanmar government spokesman told AFP, eventually breaking apart and forcing the passengers to head for shore.

The vessel was believed to be relatively close to the coast, enabling the refugees to survive.

For some it is likely to be an unexpected and unwelcome return to a state they were forced to run from, carrying accounts of atrocities by Myanmar's army and ethnic Rakhine Buddhists.

"These Muslim people were going from Bangladesh to Malaysia by the boat owned by a Malaysian man," spokesman Zaw Htay told AFP on Wednesday.

"Some are Bangladesh citizens, the majority are from the camps... people from Bangladesh who fled," he said.

Myanmar denies the Rohingya citizenship and officials do not recognise the term, instead labelling them "Bengalis", shorthand for illegal infiltrators from the neighbouring country.

They were taken to Nga Khu Ya camp in Rakhine's Muangdaw district - a purpose-built facility meant to process refugees returning under a discredited repatriation deal with Bangladesh.

Photographs showed the passengers — including women and young children — walking barefoot into Myanmar police trucks with virtually no possessions and drenched under heavy rains.

Passengers had paid people smugglers around US$235 to ferry them to Malaysia with the promise of another US$2,100 once they were able to find work in the Muslim-majority country, Zaw Htay added.

Tens of thousands of Rohingya and Bangladeshi economic migrants are believed to have died at sea in recent years trying to reach Malaysia.

The well worn trafficking route collapsed in 2015, when shallow graves were found at migrant holding camps across the Thai-Malaysian borders.

But boats still make the journey south.

After checks Myanmar will send back the Bangladeshis, Zaw Htay added, and submit the rest for repatriation process to Myanmar "if they want to follow it".

Rakhine state remains cut off from independent access, and the UN says conditions there are not right for a safe, voluntary and dignified return.

But the UN signed an agreement with Myanmar last week to begin assessing conditions there — in a bid to help refugees make an informed decision about returning.

On Wednesday the new UN Special Envoy to Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener met Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypidaw.

It is the envoy's first visit to the country as relations between Myanmar and the UN show signs of repair following months of recriminations. — AFP

TITLE: 173 Rohingya caught at sea sent to camps

Sittwe: Nearly 200 Rohingya Muslims arrested at sea last month by Myanmar’s navy after a voyage of hundreds of kilometres have been sent back to Rakhine state, officials said. nan Seasonal calmer waters have seen an increase in the number of Rohingya putting their lives in the hands of traffickers in a desperate bid to reach Malaysia or Indonesia by boat. nan But few make it as far as Kawthaung, Myanmar’s southern-most tip, where the group of 173 were picked up mid-December. nan Images taken on Monday showed 17 men, women and children looking exhausted from their ordeal as they climbed down from a wooden boat on to a beach near western Rakhine state’s capital, Sittwe. nan Wearing identification numbers around their necks, they lined up on the sand clutching their meagre belongings before being escorted away by armed police. nan They were taken to a camp in Thechaung, while the remaining 156 were transported further north to a camp in Ngakhuya in the Maungdaw township, Rakhine state minister for security and border affairs said. nan Ngakhuya is a processing site for returning refugees on the Bangladeshi border. nan “I’m not sure whether action will be taken against them or not, ” Colonel Min Than said by phone, adding that their fate would be decided by the UEHRD, a government department overseeing Rakhine. nan A bloody military crackdown in 2017 forced some 740,000 Rohingya to flee over the border to Bangladesh in violence that has seen Myanmar accused of “genocide” at the UN’s top court in The Hague. nan Bangladesh has made life increasingly unbearable in the sprawling camps with barbed-wire fences, an internet blackout and the confiscation of phones. nan Meanwhile hundreds of thousands more Rohingya remain in Myanmar’s Rakhine in what Amnesty International has branded “apartheid” conditions. nan They have nearly no freedom of movement and little access to work, education and healthcare. nan The captured Rohingya came from both sides of the border, Min Than said, although it was unclear how they ended up on the same boat. — AFP

TITLE: Foreign Ministry to focus on education on Rohingya issue

The Foreign Ministry is emphasising on the educational aspect to help find a solution to the Rohingya refugees issue in the country, Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah said.

“Education is very important to prevent them from getting involved in social problems or crime here, besides making it easier for them to be selected by a third country,” he said at a press conference after delivering the ministry's 2022 New Year’s message in Putrajaya yesterday.

Most of them do not intend to settle in Malaysia, Saifuddin said.

ADS

“They make Malaysia a stopover and expect to be accepted by third countries, but third countries are also choosy and one of the selection criteria is that they have some education,” he said.

Saifuddin said Wisma Putra was looking at ways to empower and increase funding for refugee schools run by NGOs to ensure that Rohingya refugee children in the country were not dropped out of the education system.

“The funds are not from the people or the government but are funds that can be sought from external sources. For example, among the many sources are the funding from the Qatar Foundation,” he said.

Besides, he said, the issue of Rohingya refugees in the country needs to be addressed comprehensively and collectively by the relevant agencies and ministries.

ADS

Wisma Putra always holds discussions with the Home Ministry and the Education Ministry as well as other agencies involving the Rohingya issue in the country.

“I would like to remind that Malaysia is not a signatory to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) but we play a role as if we are a signatory,” he said.

The issue of Rohingya refugees was once again raised recently after a video clip of a Rohingya child scolding people for not giving alms to him spread on social media.

Earlier, a Rohingya refugee Abd Hamim Ab Hamid, 33, known as Long Tiger, was reported to have escaped from the Tangkak Magistrate's Court lock-up on Dec 15. The man was later arrested on Dec 28.

- Bernama

TITLE: Foreign Ministry says keeping tabs on Malaysians illegally residing in Australia

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 — The Foreign Ministry is monitoring the rising number of Malaysians who applied for permanent protection and refugee visas from the Australian government. In a statement today, the ministry found the number was significant as Malaysians were taking advantage of the opportunity by manipulating Australian Immigration laws to enable them to reside longer illegally. The statement also said the move had resulted in difficulties for bona fide parties who wished to study, visit and reside in Australia. Therefore, the Malaysian Foreign Ministry and the Immigration Department will continue to cooperate with the authorities in Australia to monitor the issue. “The Foreign Minister reminded Malaysians visiting any countries to adhere to the regulations and laws of the country concerned to avoid getting into trouble,” the statement said. The Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia, Andrew Goledzinowski recently revealed that 33,000 Malaysians living in Australia had exceeded the permitted 90-day period and applied for refugee status. Those applying for refugee status included tourists and students to avoid getting sent back to their country of origin. Last month, the Australian government reported receiving 4,973 applications from Malaysians for protection visa between July last year to April this year. — Bernama

TITLE: Indonesian police name five suspects for alleged trafficking of Rohingya refugees

ACEH, Sumatra (The Jakarta Post/ANN): The Aceh Police have named five suspects for allegedly trafficking Rohingya refugees to Indonesia in June. nan The suspects were identified as two fishermen from East Aceh regency, a woman from Medan in North Sumatra and two people of Rohingya ethnicity, as revealed by Aceh Police general crimes unit chief Sr. Comr. Sony Sanjaya during a recent press briefing. nan The two fishermen were tasked with renting a small boat and picking up dozens of refugees from a large ship in the middle of the sea. The vessel initially brought around 900 refugees, the police claimed. nan “They put Rohingya refugees on a smaller ship which later broke, ” Sony said on Tuesday, as quoted by kompas.com. nan Local fisherman later rescued the 94 refugees in the waters of North Aceh regency on June 24. nan Meanwhile, the female suspect from Medan was paid by the suspects of Rohingya ethnicity to pick up three refugees from a camp in Lhokseumawe, Aceh. nan “The refugees were going to be taken to Medan, before being eventually transported to Malaysia, ” Sony said. nan He added that the police were still looking for the two other suspects who allegedly acted as middlemen in the trafficking. nan In June, three Indonesian fishermen rescued 94 foreign nationals who were believed to be Rohingya refugees from a sinking cargo ship in the waters of North Aceh. They attempted to transport the group to Kuala Tanah Jambo Aye in Seunuddon district in the regency, but their engine was broken. nan They were rescued by other fishermen after traditional fishing community, Panglima Laot, received reports about them. - The Jakarta Post/Asia News Network

TITLE: Almost 300 Rohingya refugees initially bound for Malaysia arrive in Aceh

LHOKSEUMAWE, Sept 7 — Almost 300 Rohingya refugees believed to have been at sea for six months landed in Indonesia’s Aceh province early today, Indonesian authorities have confirmed. Acehnese police said a wooden boat carrying the Rohingya was spotted by local fishermen several kilometres off the coast of Lhokseumawe, before landing at Ujung Blang Beach just after midnight “There are 297 Rohingya according to the latest data, among them 181 women and 14 children,” Iptu Irwansya, a local police chief, told Reuters. Junaidi Yahya, head of the Red Cross in Lhokseumawe, said the group was currently being held in a temporary location. “We hope they can be moved to the evacuation centre today, but their health, especially related to Covid-19, is our main concern,” said Yahya. Among the group was one sick 13-year-old who police said was taken to hospital in an ambulance. Images of the Rohingya arrivals show lines of women in masks carrying their possessions in plastic bags, and men huddled on the floor of a thatched roof shelter. Today’s arrival follows the arrival of another vessel in late June when Acehnese fishermen rescued more than 100 Rohingya refugees, including 79 women and children, after Indonesian authorities had initially threatened to push them back. Fleeing persecution in Myanmar and refugee camps in Bangladesh, the Rohingya have for years boarded boats in an attempt to seek refuge in other Southeast Asian nations. Chris Lewa, director of the Arakan Project, a non-profit group focusing on the Rohingya crisis, said the passengers that arrived in Aceh today had set sail from southern Bangladesh at the end of March or early April, bound for Malaysia. But both Malaysian and Thai authorities pushed them back, she said, as borders tightened due to coronavirus pandemic. Smugglers split the passengers into several boats, some of which managed to land in Malaysia and Indonesia in June, but several hundred remained at sea until Sunday night. The smugglers called their families to demand payments in the weeks before they were taken to shore, she said. “The smugglers seemed to not want to try to disembark them because not everyone had paid… They were basically keeping them hostage on the boat,” she said. — Reuters

TITLE: Retired army man dismisses viral statement condemning Rohingya refugees

A retired army personnel has been linked to a condemning statement about the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.

Mohd Radzi Abdul Hamid's purported official statement on the Rohingya entitled "Siapakah Rohingya?" (Who are the Rohingya?) has circulated on social media and shared by thousands of netizens.

Startled by the incident, Mohd Radzi had issued a statement explaining that an unscrupulous individual had used his full name and picture, as well as highlighting the Malaysian Armed Forces in the statement.

"The statement was widely spread for personal interest and I don't know why," he said.

ADS

When contacted, Mohd Radzi explained that the excerpts of the article were taken from his casual chat with his followers on Facebook.

"Someone had irresponsibly copied the article, tweaked it, and made it look official by inserting my picture, full name, and stating the Malaysian Armed Forces.

"This is wrong," he said.

Asked on his views on the Rohingya issue, Mohd Radzi said the government had assisted the refugees the best that it could but the government should return the refugees to their countries of origin or refugee centres under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

ADS

"We have helped them the best that we could although we did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention. They should be sent back home or to a refugee centre. The UNHCR should decide.

"We helped them because our religion teaches us to help, but we also have to be mindful. They want more than what is given," he said.

The issue about the Rohingya surfaced after the authorities prevented boats ferrying Rohingya refugees from arriving on Malaysian shores recently.

Human rights NGO Amnesty International, among others, had slammed the authorities for not allowing the refugees to enter the country.

Keep up with the latest information on the outbreak in the country with Malaysiakini's free Covid-19 tracker.

Malaysiakini is providing free access to the most important updates on the coronavirus pandemic. You can find them here.

Help keep independent media alive - subscribe to Malaysiakini.

TITLE: New Covid-19 cases hit triple digits again and 10 news from yesterday

KINI ROUNDUP | Key headlines you may have missed yesterday, in brief.

1. Covid-19 cases rose to 105, the highest in 16 days, with 94 cases being locally transmitted.

2. Health Ministry director-general Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said the responsibility to prevent new infections now lies on the public, who must practice social distancing.

ADS

3. Sarawak and Kedah have said they will not be implementing the conditional movement control order on Monday, while Selangor aims to slow down implementation.

4. Malaysians planning to return from their hometowns for Hari Raya Aidilfitri can expect to begin their journey from between May 7 and May 10.

ADS

5. Foreigners who have overstayed in the country until 14 days after the end of the MCO are allowed to leave Malaysia without being blacklisted or issued a compound.

6. Deputy Federal Territories Minister Edmund Santhara explained why food could not arrive at lockdown areas immediately.

7. Nurulhidayah, the daughter of Umno president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, will be charged soon for violating the movement control order. She says she is prepared to face the charges.

8. Umno deputy president Mohamad Hasan declined a political appointment to helm Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB).

9. MCA vice-president Ti Lian Ker will be appointed as the deputy national unity minister according to sources.

10. Johor Bersatu information chief Ya'cob Atan warned of efforts to drive a wedge between his party and Umno in a bid to bring down the Perikatan Nasional government.

11. Negeri Sembilan Bersatu chief Rais Yatim said lessons should be learnt from the country's past experience in accepting other races when dealing with Rohingya refugees.

TITLE: 47 Rohingya refugees stranded on beach in Perlis, 41 arrested (Updated)

KANGAR: Forty-seven Rohingya refugees were stranded on the Sungai Baru beach in Simpang Empat near here at about 5.30am today, believed to have been abandoned by the boat skipper paid to take them here.

The male refugees, aged between 14 and 30, were smeared with mud and looking tired and hungry when they entered the nearby village.

Perlis Police chief SAC Datuk Noor Mushar Mohamed said initial investigations revealed that 47 refugees landed at the beach, but only 41 of them had been taken into custody, while the other six were still unaccounted for.

“They paid the Thai boat skipper RM4,000 each to be brought to Malaysia in a big boat, but the skipper dropped them off at the Sungai Baru muddy beach, which the group had to wade through for about an hour before they reach the shore,” he said in a statement today.

Noor Mushar said the refugees then broke into several groups and entered the village when no local skipper would take them to their next destination in the country.

He said the 41 refugees had been handed over to the Perlis Immigration Department for further action and that it was hoped that anyone knowing the whereabouts of the other six to contact the police. — Bernama

TITLE: Home minister: Former Bangladesh high commissioner’s arrest in accordance with the law

PUTRAJAYA, Feb 10 ― Home Minister Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin today confirmed that former Bangladesh High Commissioner, Mohammed Khairuzzaman, is currently detained by the authorities. Without disclosing what offence Mohammed Khairuzzaman was arrested for, he said the arrest of the former diplomat was carried out in accordance with existing legal procedures, “If there is a request from the country of origin that we feel has a basis, then we will make (arrest) and everything is done according to existing legal procedures,” he said. Hamzah said this when asked to comment on the detention of Mohammed Khairuzzaman, as reported by the international media today, in a press conference after chairing the Committee on the Management of Foreign Nationals in Sabah (JKPWAS) meeting with Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor here today. According to media reports, Mohammed Khairuzzaman, who is reported to be living in Malaysia as a refugee, was detained at his home in Ampang yesterday, and is expected to be sent home to Bangladesh. On another development, Hamzah, who is the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu) secretary-general, described the speculation on two Bersatu ministers wanting to rejoin Umno, as psychological warfare. “If there are rumours, don’t just simply believe them. If it is announced by those who wanted to quit (Bersatu), then you can believe it,” he said. Hamzah added that psychological warfare was immediately created by politicians for the benefit of their respective parties, especially ahead of the Johor state election which is scheduled to take place on March 12. “This (psychological warfare) often happens… why is it coming out before the Johor state election? It is supposed to tell the people of Johor not to believe in Bersatu,” he said. Earlier, a local news portal revealed that two ministers from Bersatu were reported to quit the party to rejoin Umno. ― Bernama

TITLE: Saudi Arabia, UAE agree to join Malaysia to help Rohingya refugees

KLUANG: Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have agreed to cooperate with Malaysia to help the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein (pix) said this was stated by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Salman and UAE Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed Zayed Al-Nahyan recently.

"During my visit to Morocco, I had contacted the two crown princes and they agreed to join us (Malaysia) to help the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

"The UAE and Saudi Arabia have agreed to channel donations and medicines to Hospital Medan Malaysia at Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh and God-willing, in the near future we will see the three flags of Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE fly in Bangladesh," he said.

He was speaking to reporters after the handover ceremony of a school van and mock cheque for bus fare subsidy for students of Ladang Landak in Paloh near here today.

Hishammuddin, who is also Special Functions Minister and Sembrong MP said it was not easy for three countries to galvanise efforts to help the Rohingya, but it could help to enhance the image of an Islamic state that had long been regarded as extremist, backward and fighting among themselves.

"An agreement has been reached. We hope to have the three flags raised during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak's visit to the refugee camp, which is expected to be this month," he said.

Meanwhile, on his visit to Morocco from Dec 22-24 last year, he noted the country was seen as a gateway to Malaysia in building relations with new countries because Morocco was located between Europe, West Asia and Africa.

He said relations with Morocco would also help Malaysia improve intelligence and military in combating terrorism. — Bernama

TITLE: Amnesty says 1,000 Rohingya stranded at sea as Southeast Asia seals borders

At least 1,000 Rohingya are stranded at sea as Southeast Asian nations tighten their borders to keep out the new coronavirus, Amnesty International said today, urging action to ensure they were not buried in an "invisible graveyard" at sea.

Rights groups believe at least two boats carrying Rohingya, members of a Muslim minority from Myanmar, are off the coast of the Indonesian province of Aceh, but officials said they had no clear information.

Spokesmen for the Western Fleet of the Indonesian navy as well as Aceh's disaster mitigation agency and search and rescue team told Reuters they were trying to confirm the location of the vessels.

Refugees from two other boats have landed in Bangladesh since mid-April, many starving and emaciated after weeks at sea. Survivors from one said dozens died on board.

ADS

Saad Hammadi, from the South Asia Regional Office of Amnesty International, said the refugees could have been sailing for several weeks or even months without food or water, citing information from humanitarian agencies and local news reports.

In a virtual news conference, he urged Indonesia and Australia, who chairs anti-people smuggling and trafficking forum, the "Bali Process", to ensure the refugees are allowed to land safely "so that we don’t see the sea become an invisible graveyard".

The Australian foreign ministry said it could not immediately comment and a spokesman for the Indonesian foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Rohingya have made perilous voyages to Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia for years, fleeing persecution in Myanmar and poverty in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

More than one million live in squalid conditions in sprawling camps in the south of Bangladesh, with as many as a dozen people sharing one shelter and scarce access to soap and water in some areas.

The vast majority fled a military crackdown in Myanmar in 2017 that the UN has said was executed with genocidal intent.

The Myanmar authorities deny genocide, saying it was a legitimate response to attacks by Rohingya militants. - Reuters

TITLE: Don't classify refugees as undocumented migrants, says NGO

Refugees in Malaysia are in fear of being deported to face persecution in their war-torn countries.

Alliance of Chin Refugees chairperson James Bawi Thang Bik said that the fear arises as some of the refugees and asylum seekers who hold United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) cards, were arrested and lumped together with undocumented migrants.

They were hauled in during operations by immigration authorities in tandem with the movement control order (MCO) since March this year, and according to James, they were treated the same as undocumented migrants.

Based on figures by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), there are about 178,450 UNHCR refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia. More than half of the figure includes Rohingyas, while there are 22,440 Chins in the country.

ADS

"It has been brought to our knowledge that some refugees were arrested and deported on Nov 5, 2020, and there were many arbitrary arrests during the MCO.

"We hope there would be no repeats of such arrests and deportations although the government does not recognise asylum seekers and refugees," he said in a media conference in Kuala Lumpur today.

For the record, the Malaysian government does not recognise refugees and they are classified as "unauthorised migrants holding UNHCR cards."

Klang MP Charles Santiago, who was at the media conference, wants the government to explain the difference between refugees and undocumented migrants.

ADS

He wished to raise the matter in Parliament and to meet Home Minister Hamzah Zainuddin to help the refugees from being deported.

"Clearly refugees are in a different category. They run from persecution and murder. But they were held together with undocumented migrants.

"When you deport refugees, death awaits them in their home country.

"On the other hand, when you deport undocumented migrants, they just return to blend in with our society," he said.

Charles Santiago

Charles stressed that the government contradicted itself when it welcomed Rohingyas to seek refuge in the country but they are now labelled as "illegal."

"They are not here to steal our land. If you ask them about their dream, it's to go back to their country once it achieves peace. They are here temporarily before moving out to a third country," he said.

Some of the refugees, he said, are scientists, engineers and lecturers who could help contribute to Malaysia while they are still here.

"But we (the authorities) look at them as posing a security threat," he said.

Meanwhile, James urged the UNHCR to expedite the registration process for undocumented refugees and asylum seekers especially for those who have applied online.

"Expediting the registration process is crucial to grant effective protection for refugees and asylum seekers, especially during the conditional lockdown periods," he said.

TITLE: Japan to provide AstraZeneca vaccines to Malaysia if circumstances allow

The Japanese government will provide AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccines manufactured in Japan to Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, announced its Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu on Tuesday.

According to the Japanese Embassy in Malaysia, the minister said the vaccines will be delivered from July, if various circumstances allow, and will advance its coordination.

“Based on the Foreign Minister’s announcement today, the Embassy of Japan in Malaysia will continue to work closely with the government of Malaysia to provide the vaccine to Malaysians.

“This will be another symbol of friendship between Japan and Malaysia,” the embassy said in a statement.

ADS

The Japanese government previously provided medical equipment worth about US$5 million (RM20.5 million) to Malaysia in January to battle the Covid-19 pandemic.

Japan also rendered humanitarian assistance worth approximately US$2 million (RM8.2 million) to Malaysia through the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

For Asean, Japan proposed the establishment of the “ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases” to protect people in this region from the threat of infectious diseases and provided financial support of US$50 million (RM206 million) through the Japan-Asean Integration Fund (Jaif).

- Bernama

TITLE: Food aid for Chin community near Pudu market

KUALA LUMPUR: Some 300 people of the Chin community living near Pudu market received some dry goods today to sustain themselves after the area was cordoned off on Friday.

Alliance of Chin Refugees coordinator James Bawi Thang Bik said the food, totalling RM10,000, is sponsored by well-wishers and members of the Chin community.

The dry goods consisted of bags of rice, noodles, sugar, salt, flour, and sardines. The goods were handed out at the entrance to one of the health screen centre opposite Pudu Plaza along Jalan 1/77C.

Of the 300 people, 100 are children below 16, Bawi told theSun.

“We will continue to monitor the situation as we have done since the start of the MCO,“ he said.

“There have been concerns of potential raids and deportation. I have advised them to stay calm and follow the instructions from the authorities. We do not want to cause unnecessary panic.”

He estimated that there are more than 50,000 Chin community in Malaysia.

Earlier, Bukit Bintang MP Fong Kui Lin said locals here were allowed to move from their flats.

“Only the migrants are not allowed (due to lack of documentation),“ he said.

He added that three NGOs and several Members of Parliament have stepped up to provide aid for the community here.

TITLE: Anti-migrant sentiment fanned on social media, little action taken by Facebook

As coronavirus infections surged in Malaysia this year, a wave of hate speech and misinformation aimed at Rohingya Muslim refugees from Myanmar began appearing on Facebook.

Alarmed rights groups reported the material to Facebook.

But six months later, many posts targeting the Rohingya in Malaysia remain on the platform, including pages such as "Anti Rohingya Club" and "Foreigners Mar Malaysia's Image", although those two pages were removed after Reuters flagged them to Facebook recently.

ADS

Comments still online in one private group with nearly 100,000 members.

Facebook acknowledged in 2018 that its platform was used to incite violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar, and last year spent more than US$3.7 billion on safety and security on its platform.

But the surge of anti-Rohingya comment in Malaysia shows how xenophobic speech nonetheless persists.

"Assertions that Facebook is uncommitted to addressing safety and security are inaccurate and do not reflect the significant investment we've made to address harmful content on our platform," a company spokesperson told Reuters.

ADS

Reuters found more than three dozen pages and groups, including accounts run by former and serving Malaysian security officials, that featured discriminatory language about Rohingya refugees and undocumented migrants.

Dozens of comments encouraged violence.

Reuters found some of the strongest comments in closed private groups, which people have to ask to join. Such groups have been a hotbed for hate speech and misinformation in other parts of the world.

Facebook removed 12 of the 36 pages and groups flagged by Reuters, and several posts. Five other pages with anti-migrant content seen by Reuters in the last month were removed before Reuters queries.

"We do not allow people to post hate speech or threats of violence on Facebook and we will remove this content as soon as we become aware of it," Facebook said.

Some of the pages that remain online contain comments comparing Rohingya to dogs and parasites. Some disclosed where Rohingya had been spotted and encouraged authorities and the public to take action against them.

ADS

Widespread hate speech

"This kind of hate speech can lead to physical violence and persecution of a whole group. We saw this in Myanmar," said John Quinley, senior human rights specialist at Fortify Rights, an independent group focused on Southeast Asia.

"It would be irresponsible to not actively take down anti-refugee and anti-Rohingya Facebook groups and pages."

Muslim-majority Malaysia was long friendly to the Rohingya, a minority fleeing persecution in largely Buddhist Myanmar, and more than 100,000 Rohingya refugees live in Malaysia, even though it doesn't officially recognise them as refugees.

But sentiment turned in April, with the Rohingya being accused of spreading the coronavirus. Hate speech circulated widely, including on Facebook – a platform used by nearly 70 percent of Malaysia's 32 million people.

Rights groups and refugees said comments on Facebook helped escalate xenophobia in Malaysia.

"Malaysians who have lived with Rohingya refugees for years have started calling the cops on us, some have lost jobs. We are in fear all the time," said Abu, a Rohingya refugee who did not want to give his full name fearing repercussions.

Another refugee who declined to be identified said he deactivated his Facebook account after his details were posted and Malaysians messaged him telling him to go back to Myanmar - from where he fled five years ago.

"Facebook has failed, they don't understand how dangerous such comments can be," he said, referring to posts he had seen supporting action in Myanmar against Rohingya.

'Absent'

Rights groups said Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin had failed to do enough to curb xenophobia as it rounded up thousands of undocumented migrants and said it would no longer accept Rohingya refugees.

"The Malaysian government was completely absent from any sort of effort to try to curtail this wave of hate speech," said Human Rights Watch deputy Asia director Phil Robertson (below).

Muhyiddin's office did not respond to requests for comment.

Reuters found four pages with links to security and enforcement agencies voicing anti-immigrant sentiment.

"Let us not suffer the cancer of this ethnic (group)," administrators of a group called "Friends of Immigration" posted. The group says it is run by current and former immigration officials.

That post from April was removed this month after Reuters queries to Facebook.

The Immigration Department did not respond to Reuters queries. The communications and home ministries also did not respond to queries on hate speech in social media.

Among the earliest posts to draw comments calling for Rohingya to be shot was one from the Malaysian Armed Forces headquarters asking the public to be its "ears and eyes" and report undocumented migrants. A military spokesperson confirmed the authenticity of the page.

Another post that was shared more than 26,000 times was from a page calling itself the Military Royal Intelligence Corps that said undocumented migrants "will bring problems to all of us".

Reuters was unable to contact the administrator of the page. The military said it had nothing to do with the page and it was run by a former member of the intelligence unit.

Facebook removed both posts after Reuters queries. The Intelligence Corps page was also taken down.

- Reuters

TITLE: Najib: Rohingya crisis needs to be tackled at its source

KUALA LUMPUR: It is unfair for Malaysia to be on the receiving end in the conflict between the Myanmar government and the Rohingya minority, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak said.

While asserting that the government would continue its fight for the Rohingya cause, he said the conflict - which had killed thousands and displaced many others - need to be tackled at its source.

"Malaysia has always been upholding the principle of the sanctity of life, but at the same time we cannot be hosting so many people (Rohingya refugees) in this country," he said.

"It is very unfair for the affected parties to inflict more cause for Malaysia to manage and recieve these people whereby they should be allowed the fundamental and universal rights which have been denied to them," he told a press conference after chairing the BN supreme council meeting at Menara Dato Onn.

A recent offensive by the Myanmar authorities in the troubled Rakhine state had reportedly killed more than 400 people, raising questions of a possible movement of Rohingya refugees into the country.

Malaysia has always taken a strong stand against the purported oppression by Myanmar authorities against the Rohingya minority there, with Najib himself leading a movement last year in protest against the violence.

There are about 40,000 displaced Rohingyas living in Malaysia.

Najib said the government would be monitoring and managing the crisis in Myanmar on a humanitarian basis, rather than a religion-driven issue.

He added the government would consider its future course of action through the international stage, whether through Asean, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation or the United Nations.

Najib said a humanitarian mission, which will be launched by him tomorrow, would provide the necessary assistance to the Rohingya refugees that had fled to neighbouring Bangladesh.

"We have already received the approval from the Bangladesh government to conduct the mission," he added.

TITLE: Dr M calls for hate towards Rohingya to end

Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad said sentiments toward the Rohingya refugees are akin to emotions expressed against the Vietnamese who fled communist rule after the Vietnam War.

Taking to his blog, Mahathir, who called for the hate to end against the Rohingya, said the Malays were initially sympathetic to the plight of refugees, but, over time, their numbers grew, along with animosity towards them.

"Undoubtedly, we have given refuge to too many asylum seekers. They should have gone to another country.

"Other countries need to open their doors," said the Langkawi MP.

ADS

In May 1975, the first boat with 47 refugees arrived in Malaysia from Vietnam. More than 200,000 of them had resided or passed through a refugee camp in Pulau Bidong, Terengganu, from 1978 to 1991.

The recent wave of Rohingya refugees arriving here are listed as undocumented migrants, largely doing informal work and assisted by local NGOs. Malaysia is not a signatory to the United Nations Convention relating to the status of refugees.

Mahathir further said Malaysia should condemn Myanmar and its de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi by imposing trade sanctions for oppressing the Rohingya.

"We must urge the United Nations to take action against Myanmar.

ADS

"At the same time, we must expose the atrocities committed by Myanmar (against the Rohingya) to the world," he said.

Mahathir also urged for an end to the hate against the Rohingya who have been victims of oppression. This, he said, would need a concerted effort by Muslim countries.

The authorities have been puzzled over a recent spate of hate and threats against the Rohingya in the country.

Defence Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob had said the police are investigating various viral news reports, videos and audio clips to prevent any untoward incidences.

Keep up with the latest information on the outbreak in the country with Malaysiakini's free Covid-19 tracker.

Malaysiakini is providing free access to the most important updates on the coronavirus pandemic. You can find them here.

Help keep independent media alive - subscribe to Malaysiakini.

TITLE: An Analysis - Myanmar's neighbour Thailand unlikely to toughen stance on coup

BANGKOK, April 2 (Reuters) : Thailand has slightly hardened its language on Myanmar by saying it is "gravely concerned" about escalating bloodshed since a Feb. 1 coup, but close military ties and fears of a flood of refugees mean it is unlikely to go further, analysts say.That leaves Thailand out of step with some members of the 10-strong Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean), as they seek to ramp up pressure on the junta, but could also position it as a possible mediator."(Thailand’s position) is difficult, but I think there is an opportunity because we’ve become an important partner," Panitan Wattanayagorn, a political scientist at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, told Reuters.The closeness of the Thai and Myanmar armies was underscored by a request from Myanmar's junta leader, Min Aung Hlaing, to Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to "support democracy" within days of ousting elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi.Prayut, who voiced that support, had himself seized power in a 2014 coup when army chief, before taking on his current civilian role in 2019 and rejecting opposition accusations that the vote was manipulated.The personal relationship began much earlier: within armies that appear to have long put behind them the historic rivalry between countries that used to be known as Burma and Siam.In 2018, Min Aung Hlaing was awarded Thailand's King Grand Cross of the Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant "in honour of the support he has shown for the Thai military," the Bangkok Post said at the time."For them, the military brotherhood is very, very important," said Lalita Hingkanonta, a history professor at Thailand's Kasetsart University."I don't think that the escalation of violence will change the decision of the Thai government to accept more refugees...I think they just want to be friends with Myanmar more."Thailand potentially has more at stake in Myanmar than any other member of Asean, as it shares a 2,400-km (1,500-mile) border that is also Myanmar's longest with any neighbour.The geographical position, and a tradition of cautious diplomacy have been reasons for its particular care in remarks on the coup - only toughening its wording slightly after the civilian death toll topped 500 in Myanmar's crackdown on anti-coup protesters.Thailand's wording has still been much milder than that of Asean democracies Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.The border risks were highlighted by a surge of several thousand refugees this week fleeing bombing by Myanmar's forces of ethnic Karen rebels, an exodus reminiscent of the tens of thousands who fled Myanmar's wars in previous decades.Although Thailand denied that the latest refugees were being pushed back, they complained of having been blocked by Thai border guards, while a local Thai official told a meeting that it was official policy to bar their entry.While Thailand might come under diplomatic pressure to accept refugees or take a tougher stance, Lalita said Prayuth's government was unlikely to be moved."They would do something to respond to the international pressure, they would do some small things, just to show that, hey, we are responding very well to your concern. But that's it."Business links are also strong.Foreign direct investment by Thai businesses ranks behind only China and Singapore, with more than $11 billion approved since 1988.Annual cross-border trade stood at more than $9 billion in 2019 and many Thai businesses rely on Myanmar migrant workers - who officially number 1.6 million.Thailand matters even more for Myanmar, accounting for nearly a quarter of exports in 2019, mostly natural gas.But Thailand was unlikely to use its potential economic leverage with any sanctions on trade, said Piti Srisangnam, of the Asean Studies Center at Chulalongkorn University.He suggested Thailand might best pursue diplomacy behind the scenes, to try to encourage Myanmar's generals to curb violence and launch talks with ousted civilians now locked up or branded as traitors."If you have one friend you've known for a very long time, and one day he commits murder, it doesn't mean you won't be friends with him, right?" he said."You are still friends, but the best thing is to talk to him, to show that the thing he has done is very wrong." - Reuters

TITLE: Malaysia to hand over 1,200 Myanmar detainees to country's navy

Malaysia will deport 1,200 detained Myanmar nationals after the Myanmar military government, which took over in a Feb 1 coup, offered to send three navy ships to pick them up, officials from both countries and two sources told Reuters.

Myanmar, via its embassy in Kuala Lumpur (above), made the offer to take back its citizens held in Malaysian immigration detention centres last week, according to two sources familiar with the matter.

The detention centres typically hold asylum-seekers and refugees, along with others who are in Malaysia without proper documents. Malaysia does not formally recognise refugees, regarding them as undocumented migrants.

ADS

The officials did not respond to queries as to whether those being repatriated included refugees.

Detainees have in the past included members of the Chin, Kachin and the Muslim Rohingya communities fleeing ethnic conflict and persecution by the military in Myanmar.

Malaysia is home to more than 154,000 asylum-seekers from Myanmar, according to the UN refugee agency UNHCR. There are also thousands of migrant workers.

The sources said Myanmar had offered to take back only its citizens. Myanmar recognises over 100 ethnic groups but not the Rohingya, who are seen as illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

ADS

The sources, who requested anonymity, said the navy ships were expected to arrive in Malaysia on Feb. 21 and leave two days later.

Immigration director-general Khairul Dzaimee Daud confirmed the details, adding that authorities had agreed to hand over the detainees to Myanmar’s navy.

“Yes, we have agreed. All of them are from immigration depots,” he said in a text message, without elaborating.

Win Min Soe, a labour attaché at the Myanmar embassy, also confirmed Myanmar’s offer.

Spokespersons for the Prime Minister’s Office and Foreign Ministry did not respond to requests for comment. - Reuters

TITLE: Court awards almost RM1.7m in damages to Myanmar refugee in negligence suit

PUTRAJAYA, Jan 28 — The Court of Appeal here today awarded a Myanmar refugee almost RM1.7 million in damages in a medical negligence lawsuit. A three-member bench comprising Justices Datuk Kamardin Hashim, Datuk Seri Kamaludin Md Said and Datuk Nor Bee Ariffin allowed Henry Siang Len’s appeal on the quantum of damages, raising it to RM1,685,594 from RM734,000 awarded by the High Court previously. Justice Kamardin awarded a sum of RM951,514 in future general damages and increased the High Court costs to RM159,730 from RM50,000 as well as interest on the damages. He also maintained the awards granted by the High Court that is RM234,000 in special damages and RM500,000 in general damages for pain and suffering and loss of amenities of life. Meanwhile, Justice Kamardin dismissed the appeal by the respondent (Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (HUKM) and two doctors against the High Court’s ruling that Dr Caroline Gunn could represent Siang Len and was properly authorised to act as his litigation representative. Justice Kamardin also ordered the case to be remitted to the same High Court judge for direction on the management of the judgment sum and also awarded RM20,000 costs for the Court of Appeal proceeding. Siang Len, 30, through his litigation representative Dr Gunn had filed the suit in 2016 against HUKM, Dr Aminuddin Abdul Rashid and Dr Nazhatul Muna Ahmad Nasaruddin. According to the facts of the case, Siang Len was to join his wife to resettle in the United States, but on Dec 24, 2010, the night before he was to fly to the USA, he was assaulted by a group of people. As a result of the assault, he suffered injuries in his mouth and also a fracture of his mandible and had sought treatment at HUKM. Following a serious disastrous event at the hospital, Siang Len suffered severe and irreversible brain damage and was given a massive overdose of a powerful anaesthetic drug, Ketamine, five times the intended dose. Siang Len is currently in a minimally conscious state and is dependent on others for all activities of daily living. Following his discharge from hospital in 2011, he had been left under the care of Perch 1, a nursing home for refugees. In January last year, the High Court allowed Siang Len’s claim and awarded damages and costs in the sum of RM784,000. The High Court had, however, dismissed his claim for future general damages, pre-trial damages, aggravated damages and interest. Siang Len was represented by a team of lawyers led by PS Ranjan while the counsel N. Sharmini represented the respondents. — Bernama

TITLE: Syrian stranded in KLIA gets support from international NGOs

KUALA LUMPUR, April 13 — A GoFundMe page has been set up to help Hassan al-Kontar, the Syrian stranded at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2 for more than a month, leave Malaysia. Set up by Laurie Cooper of the Canada Caring Society, the fund is supported by a group of global volunteers in an effort to help Hassan reach Ecuador, as it is one of the few countries that allow entry to Syrians without the need of a visa. Six flights are needed to reach Ecuador. Hassan would have to transit through the Middle East to Brazil and Peru, and the flights cost RM16,937, while an additional RM6,159 in funds is a prerequisite for him to be granted entry into the Middle East. At the time of writing, RM12,000 out of the RM23,000 target has been reached. Among the volunteers helping Hassan is Refugee Buddy Network founder Lynda Elliott who told Malay Mail that on top of the funds from the GoFundMe page, a separate donation of money and clothes was making its way to Hassan. She added that a local representative would be reaching out to Hassan to pass him the items. However she stressed that the person would like to remain anonymous. Hassan, who received a three-month visa to stay in Malaysia in January 2018, cannot re-enter the country until 2023 as he overstayed his term. Those keen on supporting the GoFundMe cause can do so here.