

 KUALA LUMPUR: The asylum seeker swap deal between Malaysia and Australia is a pioneering and cutting-edge solution to tackle people smuggling worldwide, said Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein. He said he was confident that the new approach to combat human trafficking would be picked up by other countries in resolving the rampant movement of refugees.

I believe it is a pioneering, courageous and noble move that many will pick up to resolve this widespread issue due to economical reasons, crisis and transnational crime, he told reporters after launching the Legacy of Honour book here yesterday.

He was responding to reports of lawyers and human rights groups condemning the swap deal which would see 800 people trying to get to Australia by boat being taken immediately to Malaysia in exchange for the country resettling 4,000 genuine refugees from Malaysia over four years.

Bar councils from both countries have expressed their disagreement over the deal, noting that Malaysia is not a party to the United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees.

On the concerns raised by the groups, Hishammuddin said he hoped they would not shoot down the idea before details of the agreement were revealed.

All these worries have been taken into account. We roped in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation for Migration much earlier in discussions.

The Prime Minister would not have announced it unless all parties concerned were on board, he said.

He said the details of the deal would be revealed once he had discussed these with his Australian counterpart, Immigration Minister Chris Bowen.

On reports that a boatload of 32 asylum seekers temporarily housed at Christmas Island before being sent to countries such as Malaysia or Papua New Guinea where their refugee applications would be processed, Hishammuddin said the batch was not part of the transaction as the deal had not been finalised.

He said although the agreement was a one-off deal, if it works out, we will want to institutionalise it.