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Stone

FUSS OVER STONE EXASPERATES M'SIAN OFFICIALS

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HANOI, April 23 (Bernama) -- A stone, the size of a human head but officially declared as having no intrinsic value, has for the past month become a source of embarrassment and exasperation for Malaysian diplomats and other officials here.

This is because of the maze of local bureaucracy that they have to go through in trying to take the stone out to Malaysia.

The stone has assumed importance because it was designed to be the base for an ornamental plaque to commemorate the official opening of Petronas' representative office here by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his working visit early last month.

Today Malaysian diplomats and the embassy's local staff continued the ritual of taking the stone back and forth to yet another Vietnamese ministry to seek clearance for it to be taken to Malaysia as a decorative component of the plaque.

Malaysian diplomats said so far they had already presented the stone to the State Bank of Vietnam, the Ministry of Heavy Industry, the Culture and Information Ministry and the Interior Ministry, among other authorities, for inspection.

According to the diplomats, both the State Bank of Vietnam and the Heavy Industry had already officially declared that the stone was of no intrinsic value but advised them to take it to other ministries for a second opinion.

"Our predicament is that none of the authorities that have inspected the stone want to commit themselves to say it is all right to take the stone to Malaysia," said one of the diplomats handling the matter.

A new list of approved import and export goods issued by the Vietnamese government in January this year, among other things, bans export of weapons, antiques, wood products, rare flora and fauna besides military hardware and narcotics. -- Bernama

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