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Mahathir-VIP

REVIEW USE OF VIP ROOMS AT AIRPORTS, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants the use of VIP rooms at airports throughout the country to be reviewed to prevent abuse of the privilege.

The authorities concerned should ensure that only those eligible were accorded the privilege because there were many people claiming to be VIPs who took advantage of the facility, especially in airports in states like Sabah, he said.

"I'm aware there is some difficulty over the management of the airport in Sabah because there too many people claim to be VIPs," he added when commenting on the case of Sabah businessman Datuk Alfred Chin who was arrested in Taiwan for alleged gun-smuggling.

The firearms seized by Taiwan police were believed to have been slipped out of Sabah through the Kota Kinabalu International Airport VIP room.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after paying a farewell call on visiting Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan and his wife Lady Stella before their departure for Sarawak as part of their visit to Malaysia. Also present was Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

He said VIPs should seek permission from the Prime Minister's Department to use the VIP rooms but in the states there were those who did not do so.

There were no such problems at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang and Bayan Lepas International Airport in Pulau Pinang, he added.

Dr Mahathir said the airport VIP room in Sabah was subject to the same requirement but not many people took heed. "They do not heed the airport authorities there and this causes the problem," he added.

He said the review was not only meant for the airport in Sabah but airports in other states.

The review was directed towards only checking smuggling of firearms but other criminal activities as well.

"Usually, those who use the VIP room do not do anything wrong but we want to know what is wrong and what is not," he added.

On the sentence meted on Sabah arms dealer Vincent Teo who was fined a total of RM6,000 and jailed for one month by the Kota Kinabalu Magistrate's Court yesterday on three counts of illegal sale of 31 firearms to Chin who was not a licenced arms dealer, Dr Mahathir said it was up to the prosecution to take further action.

Teo, 50, former national skeet shooting champion, pleaded guilty to three counts of illegally selling the firearms, totalling RM63,342, to Chin, the Sabah trade consultant in Taiwan, between July 27, 1994 and March 21, this year.

He was fined RM2,000 in default three months' imprisonment and jailed one month on each of the three counts under Section 11(5) of the Arms Act 1960.

The court ordered the sentences to run concurrently.

Asked about the possibility of government reviewing the conditions for issuing licences to deal in firearms, Dr Mahathir said the existing regulations were being studied to see whether they should remain.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether the issue over the Kedah Menteri Besar's post would be discussed by the Umno Supreme Council meeting on Saturday.

He said it was up to the Supreme Council members if they wish to raise

the matter.

The issue became a hot topic after 22 Kedah State Assemblymen announced to the media that they were submitting a memorandum to Dr Mahathir expressing support for Tan Sri Osman Aroff to remain as the Menteri Besar and rejection of any decision to appoint former Agriculture Minister Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid to replace Osman.

Asked whether the action taken by the State Assemblymen would set a precedent, he said he had yet to decide on what they had done.

He reiterated that Umno had never obstructed its members from speaking and voicing their views but they had to abide by the party rules.

Dr Mahathir also said that during his meeting on Sir Julius, the latter suggested that Malaysia persuade its investors to participate in the economic activities of Papua New Guinea and other South Pacific island nations.

Sir Julius believed Malaysia would be able to play its part, given the interest shown by its business community. -- BERNAMA

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