

03/02/1997

KL delegation denied entry at Italy airport

Jalina Joheng in Split, Croatia

DEFENCE Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar on Saturday expressed his disappointment with the Italian authorities after they denied a Malaysian delegation entry to meet Royal Malaysian Navy personnel serving under Nato's Stabilisation Force at the Pisa International Airport in Italy on Friday evening.

The supposedly brief and simple meeting in conjunction with the handing of Hari Raya goodies to the navy personnel turned out to be a disappointment despite the clearance from the authorities including from the Malaysian embassy in Rome.

Syed Hamid said an investigation would be carried out and the ministry would seek the help of Wisma Putra to determine the reason behind the denial of entry.

"I am disappointed with the way our men have been treated despite the good military ties between the two countries."

Syed Hamid was speaking to reporters after handing about 1,500 boxes of Hari Raya goodies to the Malaysian Contingent III soldiers serving in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina under SFOR at the National Support Element headquarters here.

During the Friday incident, the Malaysian delegation, comprising 12 officers from the armed forces, three police officers and 14 Press members were not allowed to go beyond the transit gate at the Pisa International Airport to meet the Malaysian navy personnel and their families who were waiting at the arrival hall.

According to a police officer at the airport, they were not informed of the meeting session except for the transit landing and the unloading of the Hari Raya goodies en route to Split.

Consequently, Syed Hamid's plan to break fast with the Malaysian navy personnel and their families had to be cancelled.

Meanwhile, news of Syed Hamid's arrival in Split brought cheer to the Malaysian troops who are also serving at other Malcon III camps in Livno, Glamoc, Kupres and Sarajevo in bordering Bosnia-Herzegovina.

At the NSE headquarters, Syed Hamid, who is on a three-day visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina, advised the Malaysian troops serving under SFOR to be committed and be united while performing their duties in foreign land.

He conveyed Hari Raya greetings from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Syed Hamid was scheduled to visit the Malcon III camps yesterday to hand the Raya goodies, and to meet Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic.

(END)