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Ministries told to limit overseas trips

SEPANG, Mon. - In another step aimed at easing inflationary pressures and reducing the current account deficit, all ministries have been directed to ensure delegations sent abroad are of absolute importance.

Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Halim Ali said today this was to help cut expenditure following the weakening of the ringgit.

He said the ministries had been told to exercise greater care when approving overseas delegations.

"And if there is a real need to send one, they must trim the number of officials for the trip."

Halim was talking to reporters after witnessing the first official test landing of Malaysia Airlines' B747-400 aircraft at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Also present were Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Ministers and senior government officials.

Asked whether the Government has decided on the payment of bonus to civil servants, Halim said the matter had not been discussed.

On Wednesday, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim outlined several additional measures to ease inflationary pressures and reduce the current account deficit, including a two per cent cut in expenditure.

Others are deferment of decisions on privatisation of government projects and a review of large purchases of foreign goods by government agencies.

Later, Finance Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Clifford Herbert, who also witnessed the landing, told reporters that the two per cent deduction affected all ministries. "For example, if a ministry has been allocated RM1 million, it will now get two per cent less."

Asked whether the Government would introduce more measures aimed at stabilising the ringgit and bolstering confidence in the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, he said: "For the time being, we have done what we have to do. We can see the market stabilising ... there is a return of confidence. We have to watch the progress."

On basic trials to test the various systems and equipment at the airport, Herbert, who is also Kuala Lumpur International Airport Bhd chairman, said these would go on until mid December, to be followed by advanced trials.

Asked whether there was any delay in the construction work at the airport, Herbert said there was none.

On when commercial operations would begin at the airport, he said the Government would announce the date later.

Meanwhile, at the same function, DRB-Hicom Group chairman Datuk Saleh Sulong said Proton would increase its output to meet the extra demand following the Government's decision to provide members of the administration and public officers with Proton cars.

"The model that will be most affected is the Perdana. So, we have to step up our production capacity," he said.

However, he did not disclose the number of additional units to be produced.

On worries expressed by the Airport Limo (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd that Proton might not be able to meet its demand of 1,500 Proton cars for the limousine service at the KLIA, Saleh said: "We will be able ... we will do our best."

The company, which has been awarded the rights to operate the service, has been directed by the Cabinet to use an all-Proton fleet.

It had earlier proposed to use Mercedes Benz cars for 70 per cent of its fleet.

On whether the additional demand would result in the public having to wait longer for Proton cars, Saleh said: "We will try to cater to all those who need our cars."

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