

07/01/1998

Abdullah: Foreign missions will not be downsized

Alex Choong; Annie Freeda Cruetz

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues.- The present economic problems will not result in the downsizing of the country's foreign missions, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

However, steps had already been taken earlier to reduce the number of staff members. The Ministry will also not make new recruitments.

Badawi said all Ambassadors and High Commissioners had been briefed on the situation.

He was speaking to reporters after receiving the national flag from Thomas Foo, the expedition leader of the successful Silverstone TransAfrica 4X4 at Wisma Putra.

Also present were Director of Silverstone Bhd, Tan Sri Zain Hashim and executive director Phang Wai Yeen, Namibia's High Commissioner to Malaysia W.M. Ndeutapo Amagulu and the Under-Secretary for West Asia/Africa/OIC, Datuk Deva Mohd Ridzam.

"Our foreign missions have also been advised to spend their allocations wisely. They have been asked to identify and to carry out programmes which are considered beneficial to the country."

Badawi said that officials had already completed the task of re-adjusting the reduced ministry budget following the Government's directive.

On the Malaysian mission of peace, goodwill and harmony to Africa by the 4X4 expedition, he thanked the Governments of 12 African nations in extending their support and to ensure a trouble-free and historic adventure.

Meanwhile, Amagulu said the 55 expedition members who traversed 17,000km across the 12 African nations beginning from Capetown in South Africa on Dec 1 to Cairo in Egypt within 33 days, had an opportunity to see the various cultures, development taking place in some of the countries and the people.

"We are extremely happy with the expedition as this has helped to enhance relations between Malaysia and African nations," he said.

In Shah Alam earlier, expedition members who arrived home this morning were given a rousing welcome.

The feat has earned them an entry into the Malaysia Book of Records, and its managing-director Danny Ooi was on hand to present them with a certificate on their entry at a rousing welcoming ceremony at Wisma Silverstone.

The expedition, under the patronage of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is to date the world's biggest organised effort to take on the "fabled and treacherous route" across the Africa.

Zain said the team's achievement showed that Malaysians could perform world class feats. He added that it also forged new friendships throughout the African continent.

The expedition team said whenever the convoy entered a city or a town along their route, they would be greeted by big crowds lining the streets.

In Kampala, Uganda and Meskal Square, Ethiopia, he said, brass bands accompanied the convoy while cheering crowds raised their spirits.

Organising chairman George Wong said the most touching experience was to have presidents, ministers and their families honouring the convoy with their presence and well-wishes.

"The team members have returned wiser and enriched with knowledge," he

added.

(END)