

US embassy 'regrets' discourteous checks

SUN, - 3 OCT 2002

PETALING JAYA: Stopping short of an apology, the US embassy expressed regret yesterday over the security checks Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had to go through at the Los Angeles airport last month.

"The US embassy sincerely regrets any inconveniences or inappropriate treatment that senior Malaysian government officials may have experienced during their visits to the US," it said in a statement.

The use of the plural "officials" is understood to include Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who had made a complaint about the rough

attitude of an immigration official who boarded his aircraft on his arrival in New York.

The embassy said any future visits to the country by senior Malaysian officials "will be handled courteously and with efficiency".

The brief statement also said that there had been numerous media enquiries in the past two days on Mahathir and Abdullah's experiences at US airports during their visits.

Abdullah was in Los Angeles en route to New York to address the United Nations General Assembly.

Despite holding a diplomatic passport, he was asked to remove his shoes and belt.

Mahathir said on Tuesday that when he arrived in New York on his way to Washington recently, an official who boarded his plane said in a rough manner that no one should move until all those on board had been checked.

"We look forward to working closely with the foreign ministry, the Malaysian embassy and consulates in the United States and other protocol offices to help ensure that all future visits will be handled courteously," the statement added.

Malaysia had been placed on a list of 15 countries regarded as "terrorist risks".

Penang DAP legal advisory bureau chairman Jagdeep

Singh Deo said tightened immigration measures towards Malaysians is "reprehensible".

The US must be magnanimous in the way it treats its visitors and take the trouble to first consult with Malaysia before concluding that its citizens pose a threat to security, he said.

"Whether it is due to anti-Muslim hysteria or the recent rise in terrorist activities worldwide, it is most unfair for the US to unilaterally blacklist Malaysia," Jagdeep said in a statement.

This, he said, was against the rule of natural justice that a person ought not to be condemned without being heard.