

02 OCT 2002

US-Malaysia

US EMBASSY REGRETS INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENT OF TOP M'SIAN OFFICIALS

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 2 (Bernama) -- The U.S. Embassy today expressed its regret for the inappropriate treatment experienced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi during their recent visits to the United States.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Abdul Hamid Albar and other senior government officials too had encountered bad experiences at U.S. airports.

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

It said it would work closely with the Malaysian Foreign Ministry, the Malaysian Embassy and Consulates in the United States, and other protocol offices "to help ensure that any future visits by senior Malaysian officials are handled as efficiently and courteously as possible."

Dr Mahathir told the media yesterday that U.S. immigration officials were rude and rough towards him. He said an officer boarded his jet when he arrived in New York en route to Washington, and said harshly that no one was to move until the Malaysians had been checked.

"They can check if they want to but there's no need to be so harsh," Dr Mahathir said.

On Monday, Abdullah said that he had to take off his shoes for security checks at the Los Angeles International Airport on his way to attend the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Sept 15.

Syed Hamid, who was in Abdullah's entourage, said he was the first to undergo the security checks that requested him to take off his shoes.

The minister said that although the Americans had informed its embassies and consulates that everyone would undergo security checks on boarding their planes, the Americans should treat Malaysian senior officials accordingly.

He said he regrets the action taken by the Americans without considering the status of the person.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Youth Council described the treatment of Dr Mahathir and Abdullah by the U.S. officers as "overzealous and absolute disrespect for the feelings of the people of this country".

Council vice-president Sobri Ahmad said such stringent checks on Malaysian leaders in the name of security was unacceptable.

"These actions give the impression that the United States is scared of its own shadows," he said in a statement.

-- BERNAMA

HK AHH SK