

05/08/2003

## Cooks demand public apology from New Zealand

MALACCA, Mon. - The three Malaysian cooks who were subjected to a strip-search, locked up for a night and put on the next flight home from Auckland today demanded a public apology from the New Zealand Government, if its Immigration officers were at fault.

They want the Government to pressure its New Zealand counterpart to conduct a thorough enquiry.

The three - Liew Eng Teck, Tan Teck Hing and How Ah Wan - made the request through a letter sent to Wisma Putra today.

In the letter, which was sent on their behalf by Durian Daun Assemblyman Betty Chew Gek Cheng, they also asked the New Zealand Government to provide adequate compensation as a result of their unpleasant experience.

Liew, who acted as spokesman, said they were seeking this course of action after Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar had asked them to report the matter to his ministry.

"All we want is for the Malaysian Government to demand that the New Zealand Government conduct a thorough enquiry into our experience, and if true, justify the reasons why our rights were denied.

"If the New Zealand Government were in the wrong, it should issue a public apology to us, and provide adequate compensation for the distress and anguish caused. It should also remove the word 'revoked' stamped on our passports as this may hamper our future overseas trips," he said.

A copy of their letter was faxed to Wisma Putra this morning and another will be sent by post.

Liew, 48, also welcomed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's concern over the matter.

"We are touched by Dr Mahathir's concern over our plight and experience. This shows that our Government is more responsible and would never resort to such humiliating methods," he said.

Syed Hamid on Saturday asked the three to report the matter to his ministry, while Dr Mahathir yesterday expressed his sadness.

"Malaysians are generally very responsible people and they don't indulge in unhealthy or negative activities. Those who do that (are involved in such activities) would have already been arrested by the (Malaysian) Government," Dr Mahathir said.

Liew, How, both 33, and Tan, 27, claimed they were subjected to humiliating treatment when they arrived in Auckland on July 19. They were finger-printed and handcuffed before being deported to Malaysia. The trip was supposed to be a 10-day tour of New Zealand.

Their passports were later stamped "revoked" by the Auckland Immigration officers. Each carried between NZ\$400 (RM880) and NZ\$1,000 (RM2,200), besides Malaysian and Singapore currency and credit cards. They also brought return tickets, which cost them between RM2,114 and RM2,810 each.