

Dr M: Outside threats won't deter us

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — (Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said today

the Government will not be deterred from applying its laws by outside threats to the nation's economy.

He was commenting on a report that Mr. George Meany, president of the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) had lodged a protest with the U.S. State Department over the jailing of members of the Airlines Employees Union (AEU) and the Asian representative of the International Transport Workers Federation, Mr. Donald Uren.

The report also said Mr. Meany had cabled Prime Minister Datuk Hussein Onn expressing concern over and opposition to the arrests.

The Deputy Prime Minister, speaking to reporters after meeting the visiting Chinese Foreign Trade Minister Mr. Li Chiang, said:

"We have our laws and nobody can tell us what kind of laws we should formulate and implement. The laws apply equally to everybody.

"The fact that others are threatening to destroy our economy will not deter us from carrying out our laws."

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir added that even Ministers had been arrested and at the moment some members of the ruling party were in jail.

"If I break the law I'll go in too and I accept that," he said.

Asked about the latest developments in the MAS affair, he said the Government would not like the situation to escalate.

The Government, he added, had acted properly like communicating with the Australian Government.

"The fact that other people are improper does not mean that we should be so."

On a report that the Australian airport workers had rejected an appeal from their union leaders to release the MAS DC-10 stranded in Sydney since last Thursday, he said:

"It seems so. A time will come when we will not be able to help the situation. Big principles are involved here. It is one thing for people to strike and ask for better wages, we accept that. But to deprive other people of their property, a different attitude should prevail."

Asked if the Malaysian authorities were willing to write off the jet — one of the two operated by the national carrier — he said if the unions wanted it, they could have it.

Commenting on Australian-Malaysian relations, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir who is also the

Trade and Industry Minister remarked: "It is like a house on fire, it's very good."

Earlier, he had said it might be necessary for Malaysia to reduce imports from Australia in view of the trade balance being heavily in that country's favour.

Contacted today, Foreign Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Zakaria Ali said the Australian Government was "continuing its efforts to obtain the release" of the stranded aircraft.

A MAS spokesman said the airline's representative in Sydney was in contact with the trade unions there.

"The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) has requested the unions to release the aircraft. We hope the workers will change their minds," the spokesman said.

Meanwhile, the 11 members of the stranded jet's cabin crew have returned here, leaving only the technical staff behind in Sydney.

A spokesman for the Australian High Commission here said negotiations were under way between the Australian Government and the trade unions to get the aircraft released.