

Dr M: Upgrade airport security

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KUALALUMPUR, Thurs. — Security at airports should be upgraded immediately regardless of the findings into the hijacking of a Singapore passenger jet on Tuesday, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the review and improvement of security measures was needed to prevent future acts of terrorism.

"Investigations (on the hijacking) are being carried out ... whatever the findings are, the authorities should immediately upgrade security at airports," he said.

"Security especially at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport should be improved," he told reporters after opening the four-day *British Education 1991* exhibition at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

He was commenting on the hijacking of the Singapore Airlines Airbus by four Pakistanis 15 minutes after the aircraft took off from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

The hijackers, whose demands included the release of political prisoners in Pakistan, were shot dead by Singapore Armed Forces

commandos who stormed the Airbus at dawn yesterday and freed the 123 hostages.

Department of Civil Aviation director of security, Haji Abdul Rahim Kecot, had said yesterday security was as tight as it could be at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

A source said the DCA was considering installing special sniffer machines to detect explosives like dynamites that might be smuggled in by hijackers.

However, he said the sniffer machines, which could detect the vapour emitted by certain chemicals and explosives, were not completely reliable.

Several airports are using the machines to help trace smuggled explosives which are not normally detected by walk-through metal detectors.

"However, the problem is the sniffer machines are quite costly and are not 100 per cent effective.

"There may be problems as the equipment may be triggered by the scent of certain perfumes and other chemicals," he said.

The source said although

dynamite by itself could be smuggled aboard aircraft unless a body search was done, the smugglers would need a charger and detonator to use it.

Meanwhile, 31 airlines have expressed grave concern over the move by the DCA to adopt a centralised security screening system at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

The airlines, who are members of the Board of Airlines Representatives (BAR), said freedom of contact among passengers under this system introduced early this month was a potential security problem.

BAR deputy chairman Tony Ganly told the *New Straits Times* the board was not only concerned with the intermingling of the passengers but also whether they had been subjected to stringent security checks at their country of origin.

"This is a departure from the old system where boarding passengers are 'isolated' after the final screening before being allowed into the waiting lounge," he said.

Asked if the BAR was consulted before the system was introduced, Mr Ganly

who is the general manager of the French Airlines, UTA, said: "The DCA did not but they are not obliged to do so."

He said the DCA later informed the BAR that the introduction of the system was partly influenced by the shortage of security staff.

The Royal Dutch Airlines station manager S.T. Leong saw no reason why the DCA should introduce the new security system at the airport which he felt was inferior to the one it would replace.

"Our previous system of having final screening for boarding passengers is still the best," he said.

Qantas Airways manager Grant Pitman said a shortcoming of the new security system was the freedom of contact among the people at the departure lounge.

The board is believed to have raised the matter again in light of the hijacking at their monthly meeting today with the DCA.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said he was willing to meet the board to listen to their suggestions on improving security at airports.