

Resume flight operations quickly, PM tells officials

KUALA LUMPUR, Mdn. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the damage to the duty free shops at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport was extensive, but instructed airport officials to work speedily to restore flight operations.

The Prime Minister said an inquiry into the fire would be held.

Dr Mahathir, who inspected the damaged section of Terminal One, told reporters that it would take quite a while before the south wing of the terminal to be back in operation.

Fire Services deputy director-general Soh Chai Hock, who joined his men fighting the fire at 4am, briefed Dr Mahathir and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik on the incident.

Dr Mahathir said the cause of the fire had yet to be ascertained.

However, he said initial investigations showed that the fire could have started from a chocolate shop.

"It could have been started by a short circuit or cigarette butt," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the sprinkler system was working but was not effective because most of the shops have their goods stacked up and blocked the sprinklers.

The thick laminated glass panes prevented the firemen from bringing in their hoses, he said.

Dr Mahathir, however, said the north wing of the terminal which was not affected by the fire would be in operation.

"It may take two hours before the north wing can be

in operation again."

Disruption to scheduled flights was inevitable, he said, adding that some international flights had been diverted to Penang.

He said disruption to domestic flights would be felt more because of the heavy schedule during the Hari Raya period.

On the deaths of three employees of the Department of Civil Aviation, he said this was very unfortunate.

"The three were believed to have been overcome with fumes," he said, adding that they were the only casualties.

Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayub and senior DCA officials were also present.

Meanwhile, Dr Ling said officers from the Chemistry Department would carry out immediate investigations to determine the cause of the fire.

"Chemistry Department officers are ready to move in once they get clearance from the Fire Services Department," he said.

Dr Ling said it was important for the Chemistry Department to start investigations when the evidence was still fresh.

He said the building itself cost \$9.6 million but declined to state the loss incurred in the fire.

Malaysia Airlines, the DCA, the Customs, Immigration and police are working closely to ensure that the north wing is back in operation as soon as possible.