

‘Incident shows inefficiency in managing

# PM raps airport

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JITRA, Thurs. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, saying he was unhappy with the management and maintenance of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, today criticised the authorities for their lackadaisical attitude towards safety and security measures.

Referring to Saturday's fire which knocked out the airport's terminal approach radar, Dr Mahathir said the incident clearly showed the inefficiency of the airport authorities — the Department of Civil Aviation and Malaysia Airports Berhad.

He said they had always demanded sophisticated equipment for the airport but they were inefficient at maintaining them.

"The incident showed the inefficiency..." he said in response to questions by reporters after opening the Jitra library here.

Dr Mahathir was asked for his views on the airport fire which damaged the RM16.5 million terminal approach radar at Bukit Subang and crippled the airport's traffic system.

The Department of Civil Aviation is responsible for air traffic operations, maintenance of communication and navigational equipment and flight safety. The general administration, operations and maintenance of buildings come under the care of Malaysia Airports Berhad.

"We are unhappy. All parties have been asking for sophisticated equipment and modern buildings, but they are not efficient in managing and maintaining the facilities.

"They should concentrate their efforts on fire prevention not only to save lives

but also preventing it from happening.

"If we know that short circuits could cause fires, then we should have taken precautions to ensure such problems did not arise," he said.

Asked whether he was satisfied with the maintenance of the airport, Dr Mahathir said: "I cannot say that I am satisfied. Every party must give full attention to problems of this nature.

"We know it could happen although some were due to sabotage but we must take steps to prevent them from happening," he said.

He said periodical checks, every five or six months or annually, should be carried out, adding that mere inspection would not do.

Dr Mahathir said he did not know why the alarm of the fire detection system was not triggered off and why nobody knew about it.

"Probably the equipment was not properly installed," he said, adding that he wanted an explanation on the matter.

On whether those responsible should be removed, Dr Mahathir said the exercise would be meaningless if the "couldn't-care-less" attitude prevailed.

"If we remove the person responsible and the culture of couldn't-care-less remains, it will make no difference because the problem will crop up again.

"They have experienced this many times... They should have learnt," he said.

Dr Mahathir stressed that the airport authorities should work towards positive maintenance and not one which was passive.

"If they took precautions, no matter how high the cost is, I believe that it will be cheaper than allowing it to

and maintaining facilities'

# authorities

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# Dr M: I am sad I was not informed immediately

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be destroyed by fire even if the equipment is insured... There is no point if the problems recur," he added.

Asked whether the airport authorities were trying to cover up the incident by informing the public about the fire three days after it broke out, the Prime Minister said he was sad that he was not informed immediately.

"I am sad...I should have been informed when the incident occurred. When it happened for the first time (April 6, 1992), I immediately visited the scene.

"But this time I came to know about it through the

newspapers. I do not know whether there was an attempt to cover up... The fact is I got the information very late although the problem is a major one."

Asked whether he knew why the authorities delayed informing him, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know."

On Saturday, the DCA had tried to cover up the incident by telling a *New Straits Times* reporter, who had called following a tip-off, that it was a bush fire.

On Sunday, the *NST* received calls from members of the public on the flight delays and following confirmation with pilots, and DCA and Malaysia Airports

Berhad sources, it was revealed that the fire had badly damaged the radar control room.

When confronted, a DCA official admitted there had been a fire at the radar station but insisted it was "small" and did not cause much damage to the equipment.

On the committee formed in 1992 to review the safety and security of the airport, Dr Mahathir said: "We can form committee after committee after committee... (But) if the old attitude prevails, we can never solve the problem."

Dr Mahathir said the incident had affected the coun-

try's image and everyone should take the matter seriously.

"We must not allow this to happen again because we have spent a large amount of money in buying the sophisticated equipment. But if we do not know how to care for it, then it is pointless (in buying the equipment)."

On efforts to replace the damaged equipment, Dr Mahathir hoped it could be done immediately.

He said the authorities were looking into getting back-up systems to cope with such a situation although such a measure would mean that they (authorities) were inefficient.