

# PM: Moving head of aviation not start of reforms

LANGKAWI, Thurs. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the removal of the director-general of the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) was not the beginning of a programme of reform in the department.

The transfer of Datuk Zaludin Sulong to the Public Services Department (PSD) was decided by the Cabinet because it did not share Zaludin's view of his own capabilities.

"It is just another transfer. He received the transfer order and he is transferred ... there is no reform," the Prime Minister said.

As for why the Cabinet decided to remove Zaludin when he regarded himself to be "the best man for the job", Dr Mahathir said:

"His opinion is different from that of the Cabinet. He thought he was the best but the Cabinet has a different opinion ....

"Many people thought he was the best and that other people were not good, but opinions differ.

"Some people say I shouldn't be a Prime Minister and there are people who say otherwise. It's a way of life."

The Prime Minister was speaking to reporters after opening the 16th Asean Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry meeting at Langkawi Island Resort.

Zaludin was transferred to the PSD with immediate effect yesterday, 11 days after a fire damaged the RM16.5 million terminal approach radar at Bukit Subang. The damage is still causing delays at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Zaludin received the transfer order after yesterday's Cabinet meeting, which was chaired by Dr Mahathir.

Zaludin was quoted yesterday as saying he knew of nobody in the DCA who could do his job. He also said there was nothing wrong with having a diplomatic and administrative officer, which he is, at the helm of the department and that he had what others lacked —

management expertise.

Asked about speculation that the Transport Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, would resign to take responsibility for the airport fire, Dr Mahathir said it was impossible for Ling to be responsible for all situations.

"He has to depend on the feedback from his officers who have been assigned to certain duties," he said.

As for the DAP's petition to him calling for the removal of Ling as the Transport Minister, Dr Mahathir said the Opposition was well known for its petitions. "When there is a little problem, they will collect signatures and they have the same batch of people to sign that petition," he said.

"This time it was 1,000 people. Sometimes they collect 10,000. The best thing for them is to use the issue in the election and we will see who wins."

The Prime Minister said the Government had not yet decided who would replace Zaludin.

He said it was important that the DCA should be led by a person who was keen to improve its quality of management.

He was responding to comments by the former Royal Malaysian Air Force Chief, Tan Sri Mohd Ngah Said, that the DCA should be treated as a specialist department and that it needed an aggressive and knowledgeable director-general, not an administrative coordinator.

Tan Sri Mohd Ngah expressed his views in a letter to the *New Straits Times* today.

The Prime Minister said the technical capabilities of the director-general were not important. "What is important is that he can manage efficiently," he said. "There is a time when we can have professionals, but there are also non-professionals, who have a little bit of knowledge in aviation, who could perform well as managers."

Mohd Ngah said in his letter that the Government

## QUOTE

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should stop appointing civil servants to head the department, unless they had aviation background and leadership qualities. He also said the DCA should study the RMAF as a model.

But Dr Mahathir said the DCA and RMAF, as civilian and military entities, had different roles.

He agreed that RMAF personnel should handle their own radar in dealing with traffic at the airport, but he said non-military personnel could also be taught to handle the military radar.

The Prime Minister said the biggest lesson to be learned from the airport fire was that there was a need to increase maintenance capabilities at the airport.

And he reminded the DCA to give the true picture when such incidents occurred.

"I was not satisfied because I did not get information about the fire," Dr Mahathir said. "Some said it was a small fire, some said a bush fire, whereas the airlines are suffering losses.

"If it is big, say it is big."