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PM: Anwar approved purchase of new jet

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today former Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had approved the purchase of a new executive jet three years ago to replace the current one which has aged.

He said the jet, which would be owned by the Government, was to be used by both the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister for official foreign missions.

"I don't have that much money," he told reporters after the launch of the new Proton Perdana V6 and Satria GTi 1.8 models.

He was asked to comment on a statement by Anwar that he (Dr Mahathir) had ordered a RM200 million jet and personally designed the aircraft's interior decor.

The statement, which was issued by Anwar from the Kuala Lumpur court lock-up, claimed that the aircraft would be delivered next month.

Dr Mahathir said the current jet, which was also used by Anwar when he was Deputy Prime Minister, would be sold before the new one arrived.

"We don't want to borrow other people's jets. We don't like to do that."

Dr Mahathir said he was unsure of the cost of the new aircraft.

Anwar has been charged with 10 counts of corruption and sexual misconduct, all of which he has denied. He was sacked from all government positions on Sept 2 and expelled from Umno the next day.

On the possibility of a United States attack on Iraq over the United Nations arms inspection stand-off, Dr Mahathir said: "I hope there is no attack. I hope people will sit down and talk to each other."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was against physical assault on anybody, whether it was an individual or a country.

He was responding to a question on the planned military strikes by the US and Britain to punish Iraq for its stand-off with the UN Special Commission responsible for eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Reports today said US forces had begun to converge on the Gulf as Iraqi President Saddam Hussein remained defiant.

Dr Mahathir also hoped that the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation Summit next week would focus on solving the current economic problems faced by Asian countries.

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