

# Thaksin: Bombings work of kidnappers

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## Many Malaysians cancel trips to southern Thailand

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — As Malaysian tour agents lamented last minute cancellations to Haadyai following Saturday's bomb blasts which killed a child and wounded 38 people, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra today came up with a new theory on the bombings.

He told reporters that the people who planted the bombs, for which no one has claimed responsibility, were "kidnappers" who simply wanted protection money from the owners of places or firms they had targeted.

"I believe the bombs were caused by kidnappers, not (people with) any political ideology . . . these people make a living by seeking protection fees, boasting of their self-importance," he said.

At the border town of Bukit Kayu Hitam, tour agents have reported cancellations of up to 30 per cent for the Songkran (Thai new year) weekend.

"This time I (am going to) die . . . Songkran is the time I get an opportunity to make some money but many holiday-makers have cancelled their trips," an agent, who refused to be identified, said.

Meanwhile, Haadyai-Songkhla Hotel Association president Somboon Ponglertnapakorn was quoted in the *Bangkok Post* as saying that at least 20 per cent of the Songkran hotel reservations in Haadyai had been cancelled since the bomb blasts.

Safety concerns would make it more difficult for hotels to attract guests, he said, adding that operators were increasing security staff at parking lots and luggage check-in areas.

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Thai newspapers yesterday quoted unnamed Thai security sources as saying the separatist groups held a meeting in March in Kuala Lumpur to plan sabotage in southern Thailand in April.

Thaksin has said he would raise the issue with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad this month at a meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

Pulo's website today denied it was involved in the bombings which it blamed on the Thai Government.

In the early 1990s, the southern Thai provinces saw a wave of bomb attacks on railway tracks and stations, most attributed to separatist groups.