

Air fares still low despite increase, says Dr M

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PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia Airlines' domestic fares are still among the lowest in the region even after the 51.8% increase, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said that people should not complain too much about the increase as it was justified.

"MAS has been incurring losses on domestic flights. It is not fair to expect a commer-

cial entity to continue to subsidise the people. The Government should do that," he said.

He said the move was necessary to attract buyers for the national carrier or to interest companies to invest in it.

"Nobody will be interested in MAS if it has to continue to subsidise its domestic fares," he added.

The Government, he said, did not mind charging the poor low rates and that was

why there was no fare increase for MAS flights to Sabah and Sarawak.

Dr Mahathir said the problem with Malaysians was that they demanded the best in everything but were willing to pay only third-class rates.

The people, he said, should realise that most charges for services in the country were low, including toll charges.

Dr Mahathir said the increase would not affect the

tourism industry adversely and people would continue to fly MAS.

In Kuching, state Tourism Minister Datuk Abang Johari Tun Abang Openg said he welcomed the decision not to raise fares in the state.

"We are thankful that the Federal Government considered our request and hopeful that the decision will stay in force for a long period," he said.

The Gerakan, however, expressed disappointment over the decision to increase fares in the peninsula.

Its vice-president Datuk Dr S. Vijayarajam urged the Government to reconsider the decision.

He said it had become a trend that every time there was a price rise, the excuse given was that the last review was done years ago.