

ISA lessons

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PM: Others learning from our experience in handling terrorism

■ By NICK LEONG

KUALA LUMPUR: Countries which accuse Malaysia of being undemocratic and unjust when it uses the Internal Security Act to combat acts of terror are now learning to do the same thing, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"One reason why the ISA was enacted and had not been repealed by the Government was because of its effectiveness in countering terrorism," the Prime Minister told a press conference after opening the 30th Gerakan Delegates Conference here yesterday.

"We have had 42 years' experience with terrorism. We fought against the (communist) guerrillas ... the Al-Ma'unah ... we had Ibrahim Libya and the militant groups.

"So, there are terrorists in the country. That is why we have the

ISA," he replied, when asked to comment to charges that the country was a hub for terrorists.

"When the Government used the ISA to curb terrorism, it was accused of being undemocratic and unjust.

"But now they (nations which criticised Malaysia) are doing exactly what we did ... they are learning from us.

"In a way, we are a hub for learning on how to deal with terrorism," he said, in reference to new measures being planned by the United States to combat terrorism in the country, including the formation of a Home Security Secretariat.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would not hesitate to arrest more militants if they were identified, in reply to questions on the arrest of 16 people linked to the KMM militant group. Ten of them, including Nik

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Known terrorists will be put on blacklist, says Dr M

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Adli Nik Aziz, the son of Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, have been detained under the ISA since the group's activities were first exposed in July.

To questions about possible hijackers passing through Malaysian checkpoints, Dr Mahathir said travellers coming through the country would not be arrested if they did not commit crimes here or were not involved in any extradition proceedings.

"If they are known terrorists, they are put on the blacklist so that when they come through, we will identify them.

"When we identify them, it is not necessary that we arrest them ... unless they have done something wrong in the country or there is some extradition proceedings against them," he said.

Asked to comment on a report that a family member of Osama bin Laden, the prime suspect behind the strikes of hijacked planes

against the New York World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in Washington on Sept 11, had been given the contract to build part of an airport in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said:

"It is true that Omar bin Laden, a brother of Osama, had built a tunnel at the KL International Airport."

He added that Omar had also started a prawn farm in Kedah but it was unsuccessful. The project had to be taken over by the state government.

"The family of Osama bin Laden are not all criminals. Omar is a businessman. He builds mosques in Mecca and Madinah and he is a big contractor. That is why the bin Laden family is rich.

"But bin Laden has a big family. He has over 50 children because they (the men in the family) practise polygamy. Just because one member of the family is a terrorist does not mean the whole family is made up of terrorists," he said.

The Prime Minister also

said that just because there were Muslims who took to terrorist acts, it did not mean that all Muslims were terrorists.

"Unfortunately, in some countries - even in Asia - anybody with an Arabic name is singled out for questioning.

"Or (those with) Malay names even. Because they have the word 'bin' in their name, like Mahathir bin Mohamad, they think that 'bin Mohamad' must be a relative of 'bin Laden'."

Asked his views about anti-

hijacking measures, Dr Mahathir said that besides studying the use of air marshals, there should be some serious consideration for building "terrorist-proof" airplanes.

"It can be done. They keep thinking of making and selling aeroplanes. They are not thinking about the safety of passengers," he said.

He said people in the industry were not thinking about safety besides "using fireproof materials and all that."