

# Airlines have to be cautious: PM

SUN 30 SEP 2001

## Proposal for air marshals to deter hijacking needs study

**KUALA LUMPUR, Sat:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia needs to be cautious although local aircraft are not seen as possible hijack targets.

He said Malaysia must take care of the people's interest, especially those travelling by air.

The prime minister said this in response to Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik's suggestion yesterday that air marshals be placed on Malaysian aircraft to prevent possible hijacks and ensure the safety of passengers and cabin crew.

"We have to study whether we can use air marshals. Unfortunately, the people who build aeroplanes didn't think to study the problems

of terrorism ... they should build an aeroplane that is terrorist proof.

"It may sound like a ridiculous idea but it can be done, some things can be done. We are concerned about fire-proof materials and all that, now we want terrorist-proof aeroplanes."

Speaking to reporters after officiating Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia's 30th annual delegates conference here, he jokingly said that he has a few ideas about how an aeroplane can be made terrorist-proof but did not elaborate.

Asked if the move to consider air marshals is due to the degree of hijack threats on Malaysian aircraft, he said hijackings do not only happen in the US.

"At the moment, the num-

ber of passengers taking US airlines is down by 35% throughout the world ... people are scared because hijacks not only happen in America, it happens in Taiwan and China."

Mahathir said the government will continue to arrest militants if they can be identified.

Denying claims that Malaysia has become a regional hub for terrorism, he said: "We have 42 years of experience. We fought against guerillas (during the Communist Emergency) and now there are terrorist groups here like the Al-Ma'unah and militant groups.

"That is why we have the Internal Security Act to stop the terrorists. When we use it, we were cursed for

being undemocratic and unjust and all that, but now they are doing just that, they are learning from us and in a way we are up for learning as well on how to deal with terrorists."

To another question whether acts of terrorism are confined to some political parties, Mahathir said he does not know about that.

"I don't want to accuse any political party but we have seen one political party having its members take action towards that direction," he said.

On the call made by Parti Keadilan Nasional president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail that the government should come clean on terrorism, he said: "I think she should come clean on terrorism as well."