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PM: Others now also using ISA

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Those who previously criticised and condemned Malaysia and its leaders for invoking the Internal Security Act to handle internal threats are now practising the exact methods in their country.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the very same people who blamed Malaysia as being undemocratic, unjust, draconian and such for invoking the ISA, "are now learning from us".

Speaking after opening the 30th Gerakan national delegates' conference here today, Dr Mahathir said the very same critics were now learning from Malaysia on how to nip terrorism in the bud.

"We have had experience of terrorism for 42 years when we fought against the guerillas then... now we have the Al-Ma'unah, we have the Ibrahim Libya (religious extremist group in Memali), we have this militant group (KMM), so there are terrorists in this country.

"That is why we have the ISA. When we used the ISA to stop the terrorists, we were blamed as being undemocratic, unjust and all that but now they are doing exactly what we have been doing, they are learning from us," he said.

The Prime Minister was commenting on news reports which allegedly insinuated that Malaysia was a terrorist hub in the region.

"We are not a terrorist hub although we admit there are terrorists in Malaysia. In a way, we are a hub for learning on how to deal with terrorists."

Asked if the Government would continue to arrest suspected terrorists, the Prime Minister said the authorities would do so if the culprits could be identified.

Dr Mahathir also said the Government had awarded a contract to construct a tunnel at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport to Osama bin Laden's brother Omar bin Laden because the latter was a renowned building contractor.

He said Osama had more than 50 siblings and not all of them were criminals or terrorists.

"They are not all criminals, Omar bin Laden is a well-known contractor who built mosques in Mecca and Medina... just because one member of the family is a terrorist, we cannot blame all of them; similarly if some Muslims undertake terrorist action, it doesn't mean all Muslims are terrorists," he said.

He added that Omar was also involved in a prawn farm project in Kedah which was later taken over by the State Government after the project failed.

Dr Mahathir also said that in the wake of the terrorist attacks in the US, some countries were harassing airline passengers with Arabic or Malay names.

"Like my name... Mahathir bin Mohamad, they think that `bin Mohamad' must be a relative of bin Ladin."

On the proposal to have air marshals on-board aircraft as a security measure, he said the Government would study the matter.

"Unfortunately, the people who build aeroplanes do not seem to study the problem of terrorists. They should introduce airplanes which are terrorist-proof; maybe it sounds like a ridiculous idea but it can be done.

"They are not thinking about the safety of the passengers, they are

concerned about fire-proof material and all that... now we want terrorist-proof aircraft.

"I have a few ideas but I'm not going to tell them," he said in jest.