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US attacked! (HL)

Mustapha Kamil in New York

NEW YORK, Tues: New York City was plunged into chaos today as the twin-towers of the World Trade Center collapsed after two planes slammed into the city landmark office blocks this morning.

In what was subsequently confirmed as a coordinated terrorist attack on America, where major buildings in the eastern seaboard cities were also attacked in similar fashion, the two aircraft smashed into the two towers 18 minutes apart.

One was hijacked by the terrorists from Dulles Airport in Washington DC and the other from Logan Airport in Boston.

The first plane hit the top floors of one tower just before 9.00am, followed by the second which was caught live on television, broadcast throughout the world.

Minutes later another plane slammed into The Pentagon in Virginia, similarly causing major casualties and damage.

And an hour later, a Boeing 767 crashed near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with investigators saying it was in fact on its way to attack Camp David, the US presidential retreat.

At press time, yet another hijacked aircraft was reported to have been forced to land by US Air Force F-16 jets in the vicinity of Washington DC, apparently also on its way to attack The Pentagon.

American Airlines meanwhile said it had lost contact with two planes carrying a total of 156 passengers while United Airlines confirmed it lost two planes of its own.

All in, the Federal Aviation Administration said eight planes might be involved.

In Sepang, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was saddened by the attacks.

"I am sad that these attacks took place," he told reporters at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport last night, according to Bernama.

The Prime Minister cancelled his trip to London which he had been scheduled to leave on an 11pm flight.

Dr Mahathir expressed concern that the US would retaliate against those responsible for the raids and this in turn could claim more lives.

On whether Malaysians were in the vicinity of World Trade Centre towers which were reduced to rubble, Dr Mahathir said: "So far we have not learned of any Malaysian casualties but there are definitely Malaysians in New York."

"The WTC is a tourist attraction during the day, it is not surprising if Malaysians are affected since there many Malaysians there," he added.

New York City was paralysed as all Manhattan exits were sealed, as were the three airports in the state - La Guardia Airport, John F. Kennedy International Airport and Newark Airport in New Jersey, with incoming flights diverted north to Canada.

All other public transportation, including subways and bus services, were suspended as well and downtown schools, tunnels and bridges closed.

Sirens wailed throughout the city as firefighters, police vehicles and ambulances raced to ferry the injured to the hospitals, and evacuate Manhattan of panic-stricken office workers.

The New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street stopped trading soon after the first tower was hit, as was the entire downtown Manhattan. The United Nations building mid-town was also evacuated.

The city and several other major American urban centres were put on high alert.

In Washington DC, the White House, Capitol Hill, the Treasury Building and the Federal Bureau of Investigations headquarters were evacuated. In Chicago, authorities cleared the Sears Tower.

Manhattan was turned into a war zone. The streets in the vicinity of the collapsed towers were littered with debris, while people caked in blood and dust walked around in a daze.

Scores of people were earlier seen jumping to their deaths from the burning towers minutes before the first block collapsed.

Most cellphone lines were down as the World Trade Center towers also housed major telecommunication relay stations.

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