

Dr M dismisses Canada's rationale for visa ruling

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has dismissed Canada's claim that its new visa requirements for Malaysians is because the Malaysian passports are vulnerable to abuse.

The Prime Minister said: "If that had been the case, it would have been so a long time ago. They did not discriminate against us (then), why now?"

Describing Canada's move to impose visas on Malaysians as "very unfortunate", Dr Mahathir said: "We thought the Canadians are very friendly towards us and that they know us. But apparently, we don't know the Canadians that well."

"Of course, I think it is not fair. How can I think it is fair?" he said when speaking to reporters yesterday upon his return home after attending the Asia-Europe meeting (Asem) in Copenhagen and a private visit in Europe.

Canada had said the decision made last week had nothing to do with pressure from US authorities, which had imposed tighter visa procedures for Malaysians and those from several other Muslim countries following the Sept 11 attacks.

It said that although the country shared a long border with the United States, its immigration policy was different from that of the United States and that it made decisions based on the interests of Canadians.

Regarding Malaysia's efforts to combat

terrorism, which apparently had gone unappreciated by other countries, Dr Mahathir said: "We don't do things for other people to appreciate. We do things because they are right".

To a question on whether Malaysia would try to reverse Canada's decision, he said: "I don't think we should do anything. That is their (Canada's) business".

On a report in *The Star* on Sept 26 that Malaysia had fallen out of the list of top 25 destinations for foreign direct investment (FDI), from its previous 22nd position, Dr Mahathir said generally there was not much money going around, which was the reason the 2003 Budget stressed on the need to stimulate the economy from within.

The US-based FDI Confidence Index had reported that uncertainty about Malaysia's leadership transition, fears of terrorism and the complex relationship between politics and business, had taken a toll on Malaysia's investment attractiveness.

On fears of terrorism driving away foreign investors, Dr Mahathir said: "We are not bothered with what they (critics) say. That is their right (to say what they want)."

On Asem, he said the meeting went well and many issues were discussed in-depth.

"We made some good decisions and what remains is for us to implement them."