

US warning could be economic sabotage, says Dr M

PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the latest warning by the United States on the possibility of terrorist attacks in Malaysia could amount to an economic sabotage.

The Prime Minister said he did not know if there was an intentional plan to sabotage Malaysia's economy by issuing such a public warning and naming the country, but the fact was that the move would hurt the country's economy.

"They should tell us, who, where and when so that we can take action to prevent such attacks from happening instead of making such baseless allegations.

"But instead of telling us they went and issued a public warning like that. Are they prepared to take a bet that such an attack will happen here? If it does not happen, the warning will only spoil our economy," he told reporters after the breaking of fast at the Finance Ministry last night.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said as far as he knew, the Government had not been directly notified about the latest warning.

The United States, he said, had no right to pass judgment on other countries when that country itself was a very dangerous place and not free from the threat of terrorism.

The latest warning issued by the US State Department said attacks similar to last month's Bali bombing could take place in other South-East Asian nations, including Malaysia.

It said it was worried that the Jemaah Islamiah (JI) could target Westerners outside Indonesia.

"JI and other extremist groups present in the region have demon-

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strated transnational capabilities to carry out attacks against locations where Westerners congregate," the warning said.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that the US warning was not new as several Western governments had been issuing similar travel advisories since the Sept 11 attack last year.

"In fact, there have been reports of alleged terrorists and al-Qaeda members being arrested all over the world including Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia.

"Malaysia has taken preventive action and we have arrested their links to KMM and JI.

"But as the Prime Minister has said, it is unsafe to visit some of these same countries that are issuing such advisories about South-East Asia," he said in a statement.

Abdullah said Malaysia

noted there had been reports of racist attacks and violence against non-whites in many of these countries while Malaysia had been very safe in comparison.

"Malaysia has been in the forefront fighting terrorism and we will continue to give our full support to the war against terrorists," he said.

He said Malaysia wanted to emphasise that no country in the world was safe from attacks by demented terrorists who justified their actions on ideological, religious or ethnic grounds.

"As far as Malaysia is concerned, we are determined to continue taking the necessary security measures to ensure Malaysia remains safe."

Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai said Bukit Aman would get in touch with the US State Department through the US embassy here for detailed information on the claims of

bombing threats in Sabah.

He said police had not received information of a potential attack in this country like the one in Bali which killed 180 people last month.

"We don't know whether this matter is correct or otherwise (the report originated from a foreign news agency) and we will contact their ambassador," he said when met by reporters after a working visit to the Puchong police station, reports Bernama.

In Kota Kinabalu, Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat said the US government was being paranoid and saw everything as being related to terrorism.

"I fully understand that the Americans are being paranoid. They are pointing fingers at anyone and any place over suspected activities of terrorists.

"Sabah is as peaceful as ever and we continue to receive visitors from all over the world," he said.