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`Malaysian' allegedly linked to Bali bombings is an Indonesian

Hardev Kaur

THE "Malaysian" reportedly linked to last weekend's bombings in Bali is not a Malaysian, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"He is an Indonesian who had permanent residence status in Malaysia.

"He has since returned to Indonesia and it is up to the Indonesians to take whatever action they think fit.

"If the man comes to Malaysia, then we will arrest him," the Prime Minister said in reply to a question at a Press conference at the end of his two-day visit to India yesterday.

He had been asked to comment on news reports from Indonesia alleging that a Malaysian and a Yemeni had been involved in the bombings last Saturday in Bali.

Dr Mahathir, who left for Islamabad, Pakistan, soon after the Press conference, also said Malaysia's economy would not be adversely affected by terrorist attacks in the region as time would show that "Malaysia is a safe and stable country".

He said the country has had a reputation for handling this kind of problem for a very long time.

But it will have to look to domestic sources of investment for growth and development in the face of terrorist attacks in the region. Malaysia has, in fact, taken measures as announced in Budget 2003, to strengthen the domestic economy.

Dr Mahathir said the attacks in Bali, and Zamboanga, in the Philippines, will "markedly reduce the flow of foreign direct investments to the whole region".

"Obviously this kind of activity will affect the region as in the face of such activity, you can no longer determine where they are going to attack next."

In reply to another question, he said the Asean 10 had agreed on the need to deal with terrorism and terrorists, and member countries were co-operating to deal with it.

"There is consensus on the need for us to handle terrorism together because terrorists respect no borders. They will operate in any country, even in the most peaceful of all."

Meanwhile in Kuala Lumpur, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday no Malaysians had yet been linked to the bombings in Bali.

Abdullah said Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai had reported police were in touch with Indonesia to ascertain whether Malaysians were involved in the incident.

The outcome of investigations by Indonesian authorities would be closely monitored, Abdullah added, after launching the two-week "Islam and Science: its relevance today" exhibition at the National Science Centre.

Abdullah also said Malaysia had tightened security measures, including stricter checks at all entry points.

He said police were continuously monitoring the situation in the country and would take the necessary action against anyone who posed a threat to national security to avert any untoward incident.

"Although the security enforced nationwide is commendable, there is a need to tighten it," he said, adding that the armed forces would also co-operate with the police as and when required.

On allegations that Jemaah Islamiah members with al-Qaeda links were

operating in Malaysia, Abdullah said: "If there is such a movement or members here, then we will take appropriate action if their intention is to fight the nation and pose a threat to national security."

He said Malaysia would use local or international intelligence to act immediately instead of waiting for something tragic to happen.

"Why wait for something to happen before taking action? It's better to take preventive measures by detaining those who are a threat to the nation's security."

As to whether more Kumpulan Militan Malaysia members would be arrested soon, Abdullah said police were doing their best to track them down.

On Wednesday, police arrested five senior KMM members, including an "acquaintance" of Osama bin Laden, mastermind of the al-Qaeda terrorist network and Sept 11 attacks in the United States. They were detained under the Internal Security Act.