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Malaysia is disappointed with Canada and US but won't complain

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Malaysia is disappointed with Canada's new visa ruling and the United States' stricter entry process but will not complain to either government, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"It's unfortunate that this is the stand they have taken, but it is their countries," he said after launching the BioMalaysia Symposium 2002 at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Asked if Malaysia would lodge an official complaint with the US and Canadian governments, Dr Mahathir shook his head.

The US embassy here yesterday announced the start of the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) beginning today.

The system requires selected travellers to be registered, finger-printed and photographed at US ports of entry.

The Canadian Government has also decided Malaysians needed visas to visit the country. This ruling took effect on Sept 26.

Asked if he was disappointed with the moves, he said: "Of course I'm upset. I am not a thief, I am not a terrorist."

He said it was unfortunate that the terrorist attacks by a few individuals had caused the Muslim world to be labelled as terrorists.

"So they have to check to ensure we are not terrorists," he said, noting that this was part of the current "anti-Muslim hysteria".

Asked about the impact of the Canadian and US rulings on Malaysian business, he said foreign businessmen would know that Malaysia was a safe place.

"I think they might find it even safer than their countries. The terrorist attacks occurred there, not here. The collapsed buildings, the anthrax scares, these were all there, not here."

On the stringent checks by the US Immigration on Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi recently in New York, Dr Mahathir said it showed that the US authorities were not thinking.

"It shows they don't think at all. Even when I travelled there, an officer in a very rough manner told us not to move until they have finished checking us.

"If they want to check, it's all right, but there is no need to be so rough."

Meanwhile, Abdullah said every country had its security regulations and Malaysia could not ask the United States or Canada to relax immigration procedures for Malaysians. He said it was up to Malaysians whether they wanted to go to these countries.

"It is not right for us to interfere and seek relaxation when they feel threatened after the Sept 11 incident," he said after opening the National Land Convention 2002.

"When I was in New York I was given the assurance that the visa processing procedure for Malaysians will be substantially relaxed. But the procedure is still stringent."