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US increasingly afraid of its own shadow

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IT may have been a case of traditional American civility being undermined by unfounded fears when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was brusquely treated by US security officers recently.

Coming in the wake of equally uncivil treatment of his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the incident was as expected given front-page treatment by the vernacular newspapers.

While Abdullah was asked to remove his belt and shoes in Los Angeles en route to the United Nations, Dr Mahathir was given equally rough treatment by others in New York.

The Berita Harian reported on Wednesday that the Prime Minister and his entourage in the aircraft were ordered not to move until they were given the green light to do so.

"When I reached New York on my way to Washington, security officers who entered my jet said in a rough voice that no one should move until they had been checked.

"No need to do this. If they want to check, please check. No need to be overly rough. I am not a thief or terrorist," the newspaper quoted him as saying.

In an editorial the same day, the Berita Harian said the checks reflected the US' continued suspicion of Malaysia despite the latter's efforts to fight terrorism.

In its opinion, the US was obviously not satisfied with Malaysian efforts as evidenced in the action against Dr Mahathir and Abdullah.

This, the newspaper opined, was a clear indication of the US perception of Islam and Muslim nations.

In a cynical view of American "hysteria" in the wake of the Sept 11 attacks last year, the Berita Harian commented that the only superpower in the world may "be increasingly afraid of its own shadow".

"The entire Islamic world has been labelled as terrorists until they (leaders) have to undergo stringent checks to prove that they are not terrorists," it said.

The Utusan Malaysia got into the picture the same day with an ascerbic comment by columnist Awang Sulung who castigated the US for discriminating against Muslims.

The columnist said his long-standing respect for the American sense of equality among man irrespective of race or creed had been coloured by the recent action against Muslims.

The US, he felt, had come to a stage when it trusted no one.

"Unfortunately, we cannot do anything. They do not need us unlike us who need them," Utusan Malaysia columnist said. "So we have to accept it all."