

# DR M TAKES PRIVATE COPTER RIDE

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PM's security teams took pains to ensure flight was safe, say analysts

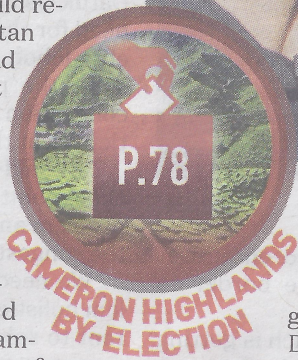
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PRIME minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad took a risk when he decided to board a private helicopter to attend a programme in Felda Sungai Koyan here yesterday, said security experts.

Southeast Asia regional director for the International Association of Counterterrorism and Security Professionals Andrin Raj said although there were no clear threats, one should remember that the Pakatan Harapan chairman had previously alleged that his plane to Langkawi was sabotaged before take-off, a day before nomination day ahead of the 14th General Election last year.

"During GE14, Dr Mahathir had mentioned that his plane was damaged and this is a concern for the prime minister. He (Dr Mahathir) could have been targeted from the initial campaign during the last election and this poses a serious concern as there could be someone trying to sabotage.

"The prime minister should have boarded a military or police helicopter with the presence of



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad being welcomed after his helicopter landed on the field of SMK Sungai Koyan in Kuala Lipis yesterday. PIC BY FARIZUL HAFIZ AWANG

his security team to attend the programme."

Dr Mahathir, when addressing the residents of Sungai Koyan here, said he had flown in a rented helicopter to Cameron Highlands to campaign for Pakatan Harapan.

The Langkawi member of parliament said he was not allowed to use Royal Malaysian Air Force aircraft, which belongs to the government, so he chose to rent a

private helicopter.

"The Election Commission prohibits the use of government assets in election campaigns so it is wrong to use a government helicopter."

Profesor Dr Nik Ahmad Kamal Nik Mahmood, a political analyst and law lecturer from International Islamic University Malaysia, said Dr Mahathir had served the government for more than 20 years and was aware of the challenges before he boarded the flight.

"This does not seem to be an issue (boarding private helicopter) as the prime minister is now seen as walking the talk by not using government assets for the Cameron Highland by-election campaign.

"Detailed planning would have been done by Dr Mahathir's security team before they decided to allow him to board the helicopter."

A senior police personnel on duty at SMK Sungai Koyan here said additional policemen, in-

cluding some in plainclothes, were roped in to ensure tight security during Dr Mahathir's visit.

"The security officers arrived in a police helicopter at the school field to ensure everything was in place before the helicopter ferrying Dr Mahathir landed with his close aides. Since it was a school field, we did not want the students or outsiders to simply rush towards him and had our men stationed at various locations on the ground."