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`Al-Ma'unah are terrorists' (HL)

Shamsul Akmar; Abdul Razak Ahmad

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today warned any group against justifying the actions of the Al-Ma'unah group, whom he described as "terrorists" out to topple the Government.

"At this time, the people are condemning the actions of the Al-Ma'unah group, but I believe that not long from now, there will be attempts to justify their actions," said Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, after chairing a special meeting of the party's supreme council to discuss the recent arms heist.

The meeting, conducted one week earlier than scheduled, was held at his residence here today.

Dr Mahathir singled out Pas as a group which he said would go "all out" to defend the actions of the terrorists.

Citing the 1985 Memali incident in Baling, Kedah as an example, Dr Mahathir said Pas, in defending the group of religious fanatics had justified the murder of four policemen killed in the operation.

"This will be the opinion voiced by groups whom we know sympathise with these people because they have the same objective - fighting supposedly for the establishment of an Islamic State," he added.

The Prime Minister said many people would be swayed by such an opinion and hoped that there would be no Friday sermons (khutbah) or religious lectures aimed at justifying the actions of the Al-Ma'unah.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was worried that people would sympathise with the actions of the terrorists if it did not explain the real motive of the group, which he described as belonging to the "lunatic fringe".

Asked about a letter, which appeared in the Internet Website of an Opposition party, blaming the incident on Umno's own failures, Dr Mahathir said it was because Pas knew that some of the Al-Ma'unah leaders were members in the Badan Amali Pas.

He anticipated that Pas would try to whitewash the criminal actions of the terrorists.

Pas, said Dr Mahathir, would say that they were not wrong, arguing that their actions, though "unwise", were borne out of frustration towards the Government for not being `Islamic', not implementing the hudud (Islamic penal code) and for condoning the sale of alcoholic beverages.

Dr Mahathir said the people should realise that the incident was a criminal act which involved torture and murder and had nothing to do with fighting for an Islamic State.

In fact, he added, the group had given Islam a bad name.

He pointed out that Umno's struggles for the religion was by helping Muslims to acquire knowledge in all fields of endeavour to achieve success.

Dr Mahathir said the incident was caused by a proliferation of groups spreading hatred towards the Government.

He said hatred against the Government had been displayed in varying degrees.

"There are those who just hate (the Government) but don't do anything. Then, there are those who hate and don't vote for the Government.

"But at the extreme, they reach a level where they are willing to murder because of hatred.

"This is the danger of the politics of hatred," added Dr Mahathir.

He said Umno displayed no hatred towards any party but only on actions

forbidden by Islam such as the slandering, spreading lies and misinterpreting the religion.

As such he said the party would conduct programmes to explain what really happened and the party's approach in striving for Islam.

Dr Mahathir instructed all party divisions to conduct a thanksgiving ceremony (majlis kesyukuran) that the incident was resolved quickly and also in gratitude to the army and police.

He expressed Umno's and the Government's condolence to the families of those killed, adding that a White Paper may be prepared of the incident.

On the motive of the Al-Ma'unah's group, Dr Mahathir revealed that it was to topple the Government.

"In their first radio communication they demanded that the Prime Minister and all his kulis (coolies) step down.

"That means they want the Prime Minister and the whole Cabinet to resign," he said, adding that a study would be conducted on the practice of the Al-Ma'unah on whether it merited to be banned or otherwise.

He said the Government would also ensure that all deviationist groups be dealt with in a reasonable manner.

On the possibility that the group was prepared to assassinate Government leaders in pursuit of their cause, he said based on their willingness to murder and torture hostages, it was not far-fetched.

Dr Mahathir said there were two aspects which the authorities had slackened in dealing with the terrorists.

"One was for not taking action when the group was first detected conducting `exercises', taking for granted that they were just a group of silat practitioners."

The second aspect, he added, was that despite the army's move to tighten security on its armoury, it did not anticipate that some people would masquerade as senior army officers to conduct arms inspections.

Asked how the murder of the two non-Muslim hostages would affect racial sentiments in the country, Dr Mahathir said:

"This Government and Umno will not support any such discrimination, any such action taken against any people simply because of differences in religion."

He warned any group against attempting such actions.

"Anybody tries, I'm afraid they might get something that they will never forget."

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