

19 JUL 2000

Mahathir-Chaos

ARMED GROUP TRIED TO CAUSE TROUBLE BUT FAILED, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, July 19 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight that three to five men from the gang that carried out the arms heist at the army camps in Gerik on July 2 had left their hideout in Sauk and tried unsuccessfully to cause trouble elsewhere.

They did not escape the cordon thrown by the security forces but had left Sauk earlier taking an M16 rocket launcher with them, he said when asked whether these gang members had escaped, were in Kuala Lumpur and had tried to cause trouble.

The prime minister said they had other plans and their aim was to cause chaos by shooting at certain places to raise doubts about security in Malaysia.

"They actually took the M16 out. There were also reports that they shot at a temple, they shot at a Carlsberg factory. But they did not know how to use the weapon effectively, so nothing happened," he said in a special interview aired over Radio Televisyen Malaysia and TV3.

"The government admits that we did not report this matter until I mentioned it because we did not want the people to be worried when we are capable of handling the situation," he said.

Dr Mahathir said they had all been caught and the weapons had also been recovered.

A group of 15 people posing as military officers had tricked their way into two army camps in Gerik and escaped with more than 100 weapons and a large cache of ammunition on July 2.

Together with 13 other members of the Al-Ma'unah deviationist group, they holed up in Bukit Jenalek, Sauk, killing two security forces personnel whom they had taken hostage, before giving themselves up. One of their members was also shot dead.

Dr Mahathir said police swiftly identified the perpetrators and were able to locate where they had hidden the arms which were recovered in Sungai Petani.

He said the killing of the two non-Muslim hostages by the armed group had raised doubts among the non-Muslims to whether the Muslim intended to harm and kill them.

"This is unhealthy for a multiracial society like Malaysia," he said.

He said the government had all this while inculcated goodwill and brotherhood among the multiracial population because the country needed peace for the wellbeing of all the races and this had been achieved.

"But these people do not at all appreciate the racial unity that has been achieved and they do things that they know will cause unease among the non-Muslims, as if there are Muslims who want to commit crimes against them," he added.

-- BERNAMA

AR AHH JK