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Attack on the DAP over recent arms heists unfair

Lim Kit Siang

I REFER to the letter by Chairil Anuar "Lessons from arms heist" (NST, July 12). He wrote:

"For once, the opposition parties and people like Lim (Kit Siang) and Chandra (Muzzafar) should offer their hands in co-operation to the ruling party to jointly work towards ridding Malaysian society of elements such as the Al Ma'unah and to realise a situation where such elements cannot breed.

"I cannot understand how any rational Malaysian could condone or not condemn Al Ma'unah's acts of terrorism and murder.

"I cannot understand how Reformasi websites like Laman Reformasi or their sympathisers, like Malaysiakini.com could praise these monsters or congratulate them for `breaching security'.

"Do Lim, Pas, Chandra and Keadilan support the view expressed in Laman Reformasi and Malaysiakini?"

Since I have been targeted for attack by the writer of the "Letter of the Day", let me respond to his two questions directed specifically at me on the basis of the record of my media statements in the past few days, namely:

* DAP's offer of co-operation to the ruling party. In my media statement on July 11, calling for a "Joint Barisan Nasional-Barisan Alternatif Committee" to work out a bi-partisan national counter-strategy to the Al Ma'unah arms heists, I said:

"The Grik arms heists and the Al Ma'unah hostages and barbaric torture/murder of an army ranger and police detective have raised very grave national issues which call for sober, serious and responsible responses by Barisan Nasional and Barisan Alternatif leaders, who should resist the temptation to politicise them merely to score petty political points.

"National interest demands that the Barisan Nasional and the Barisan Alternatif should co-operate to work out a bipartisan national counter-strategy to prevent the recurrence of the Grik arms heists and to stamp out deviationist religious groups which espouse violence and are prepared to maim and murder to achieve their purported ends.

"This can be done through the establishment of a Joint Barisan Nasional-Barisan Alternatif Committee to work out a bipartisan national counter strategy to prevent the recurrence of the Grik arms heists and the Al Ma'unah hostages and barbaric torture/murders and to effectively address the grave issues raised by them.

"It will be a national misfortune if the Grik arms heists and the Al Ma'unah hostages/murders are turned into a political `football', clouding or even sidelining the grave issues highlighted by them.

"It is most unfortunate that the motion by DAP MP for Kepong, Dr Tan Seng Giaw yesterday to debate in Parliament the Grik arms heists and the Al Ma'unah group as a matter of urgent, definite public importance was rejected by the Speaker Tun Zahir Ismail on the grounds that it was not `urgent'.

"The reason for the rejection is not only unsupportable but makes a mockery of Parliament as the highest political forum in the country relevant to the country by being able to address the most topical issues and concerns of the people.

"The statement by the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad

that a White Paper on the Al Ma'unah arms heists would be presented to Parliament is most welcome, as this was also proposed in Dr Tan's motion yesterday.

"It is unfortunate, however, that the Prime Minister has taken the first step to turn the Al Ma'unah arms heists into a political `football' by accusing, without proof, that Pas and other groups would try to whitewash the cruel actions and deviationism perpetrated by the Al Ma'unah group.

"As the Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir should be taking the initiative to invite all political parties, including the Barisan Alternatif opposition parties, to adopt a joint common approach to deal with the various grave issues highlighted by the Al Ma'unah arms heists, instead of politicising the issues by launching a gratuitous and unprovoked political attack on the Opposition.

"Political leaders must respond to the issues raised by the Al Ma'unah arms heists not as Umno, MCA, MIC, Pas, Keadilan or DAP leaders but as leaders representing all Malaysians regardless of race, religion or political affiliation who cherish security, peace, harmony and tolerance in our multi-racial and multi-religious nation."

I also said: "While all Malaysians, including Barisan Nasional and Barisan Alternatif leaders, must act in unison to work out a common national strategy to overcome these grave problems, as there can be no compromise to preserve national security, peace, harmony and tolerance in multi-racial and multi-religious Malaysia, we must not go overboard and press panic buttons as to lose the proper perspective."

I do not need to quote at length as to what I meant by "not go overboard" and "press panic buttons as to lose the proper perspective", except the following conclusion:

"In these circumstances, while the Government should learn the lesson from Al Ma'unah to be on greater alert to stamp out religious deviationist groups which espouse violence to achieve their purported ends, it should be even more concerned about the shocking breakdown of military discipline and security as happened in the two Grik army camps as it is such military lapses which pose the greatest threat to national security and safety."

I ended my media statement thus:

"Fanatical religious deviationist sects espousing violence must be stamped out but they should not be politicised into party political issues.

"Right-thinking Malaysians hope that the current meeting of Parliament will see Barisan Nasional and the Barisan Alternatif MPs setting the example of putting national interests above party politics, by agreeing to address the many important national concerns and issues highlighted by the Al Ma'unah arms heists as transcending party politics instead of turning them into a political `football' to further divide the country."

* Condemnation and no condoning of Al Ma'unah brutal crimes. The allegation that the DAP and I had condoned and not condemned the Al Ma'unah crimes is pure falsehood.

Immediately after the news reports of the end of the Al Ma'unah arms heists, I said in my media statement dated July 7:

"The police and the army, and in particular Army Field Commander Lt Jen Datuk Zaini Mohd Said, are to be commended for the end of the Al Ma'unah arms heists without more loss of lives.

"The arms heists could have a very bloody end if the gang had been well-trained and highly-professional as compared to most of Al Ma'unah gang members who had not held a gun before and did not know how to make full use of the huge stash of weapons.

"In this sense, the country was lucky but not lucky enough to avoid the loss of three lives.

"The nation mourns the death of Det Kpl K. Sagadevan of the Special Branch and Private Mathew Medan, 25, an army ranger, two hostages who were killed by the criminal gang.

"These two deaths would not have occurred if there had not been the shocking lapse of security at the two military camps where the two arms heists were successfully staged on Sunday.

"The Government should ensure that the families of Sagadevan and Mathew are fully compensated for their unnecessary deaths and Parliament should be informed of the details.

"While the people commend the police and army for ending the Al Ma'unah arms heists without more loss of lives, the nation wants to see an immediate revamp of military weaponry security procedures and restoration of military discipline to ensure that no officer would be allowed to pull rank to disregard rules and regulations leading to the two army heists on Sunday."

On July 9, I said: "The two-week Dewan Rakyat meeting beginning tomorrow has to address many important and fundamental national problems, the most recent of which is the Grik arms heists and the Al Ma'unah deviation sect.

"Members of Parliament from the Barisan Nasional and Barisan Alternatif should regard these issues as of overriding national interests which are of great concern to all Malaysians and political parties and they should not be turned into a partisan political football to score petty political points.

"For this reason, I would make a special call to Dr Mahathir to issue a directive to Barisan Nasional MPs not to politicise the issues involved, just as Barisan Alternatif MPs would not want to score petty political points on these important matters.

"The nation and people had heaved a collective sigh of national relief on Thursday when the five-day Grik arms heists and Kampong Janelik hostage/siege ended without a bloodbath, but it is wrong and dishonest for government leaders like the Defence Minister, Datuk Najib Tun Razak to claim that it was 'total victory' for the authorities or that it was a 'bloodless end'.

"The lives of three persons lost, two from the police and the army, and the national trauma and shame that such a vast cache of high-calibre weaponry could be so easily stolen from high-security military armouries and the disastrous prospect of a bloodbath had these heavy weaponry, including some 100 M-16 rifles, heavy and light machine guns, grenade launchers, high-explosive shells and thousands rounds of ammunition, fallen into dangerous and highly-professional hands cannot be glossed over by the fact that the end was not as bloody as feared."

On July 10, I said:

"The brutal torture and killing of police detective Kpl R. Sagadevan and commando Mathew Medan must be condemned and the full rigours of the law must be brought to bear against criminals who had committed these heinous crimes, but from the events that unfolded after the arms heists in the two military camps, it is clear that national security, safety and welfare was compromised not so much by a motley gang led by a 'mentally-unstable' former army private, but by the shocking breakdown in military discipline and weapon security system.

"To ensure that the army does not become the greatest threat to national security and safety because of the laxity of military discipline and security, the Cabinet should give an assurance that there would be public court martials down the whole chain of military command for those responsible for the Grik arms heists scandal.

"In this connection, Malaysians are still waiting for an explanation

from Najib (Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak) as to why the armed forces did not know that Mathew was missing and was one of the four hostages in the Kampong Jenalik hostage siege until after the surrender of the Al Ma'unah group, as this reflects another shocking lapse of military efficiency.

"Malaysians also want to know why the police are not taking action to recognise the service of Sagadevan through a posthumous promotion and award, which the Defence Ministry proposes to do in the case of ranger Mathew.

"The Home Ministry should come out with a clear statement on the posthumous promotion and award for Sagadevan."

On July 11, I said:

"The Al Ma'unah murders, and in particular the barbaric torture of Sagadevan and Mathew must be condemned unreservedly and those responsible for such heinous crimes must face the full wrath of the law." Those who are interested in my views can visit the websites <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3939/> or <http://www.malaysia.net/dap/enet.htm>

What is clear however, is that there could be no basis whatsoever for your "Letter of the Day" to suggest that the DAP and I had not, at the earliest opportunity, condemned the Al Ma'unah crimes or that the DAP had not offered our "hands in co-operation to the ruling party to jointly work towards ridding Malaysian society of elements such as the Al Ma'unah and to realise a situation where such elements cannot breed".

Your "Letter of the Day" is one of great dishonesty, mischief and malice and the NST and Chairil Anuar should have the decency to apologise for such a letter.