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Bid to spark unrest revealed (HL)

Abdul Razak Ahmad; Rosihan Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight several members of the Al-Ma'unah group, one armed with an M16 assault rifle equipped with a grenade launcher, attacked a brewery and a temple after the weapons heist in Grik on July 2.

"They took this weapon and shot at a temple and at the Carlsberg brewery, but they did not know how to use it effectively, so nothing happened," he said in a television interview over RTM.

The Prime Minister did not say where the attacks took place but the Carlsberg brewery is in Shah Alam.

He said he did not disclose the matter earlier to prevent panic since the situation was yet to be resolved. The criminals involved in the attacks - numbering "between three and five" - have been arrested and the weapon recovered.

"Their intention was to spark unrest by attacking a particular place that would cause suspicion whether our country is really safe," said Dr Mahathir.

The hour-long pre-recorded interview was chaired by Prof Datuk Dr Firdaus Abdullah. Also on the panel of interviewers were TV3 managing editor of news and current affairs Chamil Wariya and Utusan Melayu group editor-in-chief Khalid Mohd.

Dr Mahathir said the robbery was a mere criminal action and had nothing to do with jihad (Holy War), as claimed by some parties.

"Killing people, torturing those who have not done anything against us, is not in the meaning of jihad."

Asked on his early reaction to the incident, Dr Mahathir he was initially shocked on being told of the incident by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak.

"I was worried whether this was the beginning of something bigger which was planned; that there would be a rebellion in our country which could lead to many deaths, killings and so on," said the Prime Minister.

However, he added that as the incident unfolded the Government realised that this was not the case.

He pointed out the group's foolishness in choosing to go to Bukit Jenalek after committing the arms heist instead of opting for a safe hideout, believing that since they had "spiritual powers" they could not be detected.

The Prime Minister said such incidents originate from campaigns by certain groups to sow hatred towards the Government.

"They have inculcated this hatred and anger for a long time, since 20 and 30 years ago. And since this time there are now people who feel an explosive hatred towards the Government."

Dr Mahathir explained that at such a late stage, the hatred becomes difficult to redress as the group would regard non-Muslims and other Muslims as people who can be murdered justifiably.

"Such incidents always happen when small groups of Muslims want to justify their criminal actions towards the bigger group of Muslims ... they start by saying people are not Muslims but non-believers so it is all right to kill them."

He said the campaign to sow hatred was not limited in scope to the general public but was also targeted towards civil servants.

"Civil servants are told the Government they are part of is not Islamic

... so they do not have to feel guilty if they do not hold to their promises, their pledge to serve the Government."

Dr Mahathir was asked on the Government's long-term plan to prevent future incidents like the Al-Ma'unah arms heist and deviant groups.

He said efforts must be made to eradicate such baseless hatred sowed against the Government through information campaigns aimed at all levels of society.

He described as "strange" allegations on Government complicity in the incident and explained that the criminals acted alone.

"To have planned it we would need to cooperate with criminals who truly hate the Government and ask them to do something that would expose them (to) the possibility of getting killed.

"If we were to ask someone like this to do something for the Government, he must firstly be a strong supporter of the Government. Instead ... there are indications they (the arms robbers) are sympathisers of the opposition."