

19 JUL 2000

Interview-Text

FULL TEXT OF SPECIAL INTERVIEW WITH THE PM ON AL-MA'UNAH

KUALA LUMPUR, July 19 (Bernama) -- Following is the full text of the Special Interview with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the military weapons robbery committed by the Al-Ma'unah group and the killing of two hostages. The interview was aired over RTM and TV3 tonight.

The interview was moderated by Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Affairs) Universiti Malaya Dr Firdaus Abdullah while the panelists were the Editor-in-Chief of the Utusan Melayu Group Datuk Khalid Mohamad and TV3 Senior General Manager (News and Current Affairs) Chamil Wariya.

Question : The main subject of this discussion will be the arms robbery incident at Camp 304, Territorial Army Battalion, Grik and the brutality of the robbers at Bukit Jenalek, Sauk, two weeks ago.

Eventhough all the robbers had been arrested and their irrational action had been countered and the situation had become peaceful and normal once more, still the incident at the military camp at Grik and Bukit Jenalek, Sauk, was stunning, worrying and also bewildering.

However as the situation had returned to normal and the criminals had been arrested, our disturbed feelings and alarm had been eased. Still we still have a feeling of disbelief and wonder why in this modern and sophisticated era of science and technology there are still groups which are so easily misled by deviationist teachings and resort to irrational action.

These are among the questions which we will pose to Datuk Seri. Permit me to begin by asking the initial reaction of Datuk Seri on being told of the incident.

Answer: Firstly when I got this telephone call from (Defence Minister) Datuk Seri Najib (Tun Razak) telling me that a group of more or less 15 people had committed robbery and taken away a large quantity of weapons from our (military) camp in Gerik, I was shocked as this is something which normally does not occur in our country. I was worried as to whether this was the beginning of something bigger that is a planned rebellion in our country and probably leading to many deaths, killings and so on. I was really shocked as this normally does not happen in our country.

Question: What is the latest information Datuk Seri?

Answer: Now we have established as to who did this and their aims and also the feelings of uneasiness as there are groups which are arousing the feelings of hatred among non-Muslims and also among Muslims and this has happened in Sarawak for instance. We are monitoring the situation as this is what we fear most.

Question: Can this be said to be baseless, Datuk Seri? As Datuk Seri's alarm as to whether this can be the prelude to a rebellion had been found to be baseless after the latest information.

Answer: This has proved to be baseless.... for initially we did not know to what extent it would lead to.

Question: Datuk Seri, probably, the people were indeed shocked for this is the first time in the post Merdeka history a group had robbed a military camp and had intended to use the weapons to topple the leaders and the government. Can Datuk Seri tell us why this has happened now?.

Answer: Now I feel this began with the effort to discredit the government and accuse it of being unIslamic. Without any basis allegations were made which could arouse feelings of anger among Muslims who had hoped that this country would follow methods which they considered would be in line with Islamic governance. Hence this began with the accusation that this government is unIslamic.

Question: According to Datuk Seri, this group aimed to topple the

government and the leaders including Datuk Seri as Prime Minister? Did this incident then happen because of the campaign of hatred mounted by certain groups.

Answer: Yes, it began with the allegation that this government is unIslamic and hence to win support for certain groups, they began this campaign of hatred against the government claiming it to be unIslamic. They nurtured this feeling of hatred for a long time, 20 to 30 years and during this period there were people who really hated the government and their hatred boiled over. As we all know that something that nurtured in us while we are still small would stick with us and become part of our culture when we reach adulthood and it will be difficult for us to change our stand or beliefs.

This feeling of hatred can be found in stages. There are groups which hate but do not do anything while the hatred of others is limited to rejecting the government party in the election but there are also extremists who are really angry to the extent of willing to topple the government, to kill and torture. In fact they are ordinary people and not murderers or torturers but because of this hatred nurtured in them over a long period against the government they have reached a level where they are willing to kill and resort to force to overthrow the government.

Question: Datuk Seri, this group feels that the present government is not Islamic enough but Islam in what mould Datuk Seri could be right for us the people of Malaysia?

Answer: It is easy to accuse the government of being unIslamic but when we see the more than 50 countries which were considered Islamic and were members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) for instance there is not much difference between them and Malaysia. They too allowed certain things because of the prevailing situation.

In Malaysia 40 per cent of our population is non-Muslim. Hence if we take certain action that will create chaos in the country due to opposition from certain groups, this is also prohibited by Islam. Hence this shows that we are abiding by Islamic teachings which require us to be moderate in anything we do for Islam.

Islam gives us much leverage to suit situations. For instance when praying if we cannot stand it does not matter if we sit down. If we cannot sit down it does not matter we can lie down. Even if we do not face the kiblat we can still pray as Islam is not hard on its followers but takes into account the prevailing situation.

Muslims living as minorities in other countries could not do many of the things which Islam required of them but they were still Muslims as they did works of charity and discharged their religious obligations.

Question: There seems to be an irony in their actions and this is sad. The Al-Ma'unah claim they are struggling to project Islam but without their realising they have also committed acts which are against Islam such as abusing innocent people. The image they have portrayed of Islam is one of irrational militancy?

Answer: When a person is overcome by anger, when his intention may to champion something, he can still deviate from the requirements of his struggle. If they hold to the true teachings of Islam, they will know that they should not kill or torture people.

The victims did not do anything to them. If they were enemies attacking them, they have the right to fight the enemy. However they are security officers safeguarding their security as well as ours. Hence when they were overcome by anger, they no longer abided by the teachings of Islam to be rational and just in their actions, to be moderate and so on. Hence they had departed from the teachings of Islam.

Question: They have also linked their struggle to a Jihad (Holy War). In Islam there is Jihad no doubt but it is obvious the concept has been abused. Does robbing a military camp of its weapons and murdering constitute a jihad?

Answer: We have to undertake jihad as Muslims but in certain situations

and with certain aims. We cannot however justify crime by saying it is jihad. Killing and torturing people who did not do any harm to us does not come within the ambit of jihad.

Championing the fate of Muslims, bringing success to them and developing them was a jihad.

To me when we equip Muslims with knowledge, efficiency and intelligence so that they could defend themselves from oppression and abuse perpetrated by the enemies of Islam such as in Bosnia and in Kosovo, that is jihad.

But when one group goes to war, fights with other Muslims and claim they are involved in a jihad, it has nothing to do with the definition of jihad. Such type of people usually begin by saying of others that even though they were Muslims they were actually not followers of the faith. They are infidels. Once a person is considered an infidel they consider the person's blood has been sanctioned for them. This is just the beginning. They claim to have their origins from people of Islamic stock and leave the majority Islamic group claiming that the majority of Muslims were not Islamic. Only they themselves were Muslims. Hence because they were Muslims and the majority was not Muslim, it was legitimate for them to act against the majority of Muslims whom they had labelled as infidels.

We see this thing happening often when a small group of Muslims want to legitimise their criminal action against other large Muslim groups. They begin by labelling them as unIslamic and infidels and so we can kill them.

Question: The Government had implemented the policy of instilling Islamic values over a long period. What is confusing me is Malays of the Islamic faith are an educated lot from the aspect of religion also and so why are they acting like this. Why are they still drawn to ridiculous teachings and deviationist tendencies?

Answer: While the government was striving to instill Islamic values particularly in the government service, there are others who are not happy if we instill Islamic values such as trustworthiness, sincerity, responsibility, fulfilling pledges and other noble values which were also among Islamic values. If we instil these values, we will become a good group, a good Ummah.

They have other intentions, for if all become good, they cannot realise their aims. Hence they try to deviate the government's aspirations by bringing about teachings which create hatred towards the government claiming that it was part of Islamic teaching.

For instance, government officers are told that the government they are serving is unIslamic for not implementing Islamic laws particularly the Hudud Law. Hence they should not feel any guilt for not fulfilling the pledges and promises they made to serve the government, It was also legitimate for them to do something that was opposed to government aspirations and from then their attention is focused on hating the government.

To fight the government, particularly when they are a small group and are incapable of fighting, they look for magical powers and invincibility... can become oil...become invisible. All this is fictitious. There is no such magical powers in Islam. We can read the verses of the Quran but it will not give us powers more than that of the Prophet (Muhammad SAW) for we know the Prophet was also injured. Saidina Hamzah was killed in Jabal Uhud. Hence it was impossible for people in Malaysia to become more invincible through the study of such knowledge. They learn this "ilmu" as they wanted to do something which they knew would not be successful and hence they need this extraordinary power and with that they try to be courageous. But in fact they are cowards. People who are really brave would be prepared to face any danger, would plan how to overcome problems and achieve their objectives. However these people are afraid. To be brave they look for something extraordinary. They think they can become brave but in fact they are afraid and if they so realised they will not have the courage to do anything at all.

Question: Datuk Seri, in our country it's easy to spark a fight. We

just need to pitch the Chinese against the Malays, the Muslims against the non-Muslims. I cannot imagine what would have happened if Al-Mau'unah members had escaped from Sauk, come to Kuala Lumpur with all their weapons and start creating trouble in the capital. How are we to prevent such things from happening?

Answer: If we want to prevent them, we got to start from the beginning, which is to kill the efforts to instil this unfounded hatred. I don't understand their hatred towards the Government and government leaders to the extent that they cannot think rationally. That's the beginning. The Government is certainly responsible for safeguarding peace and for this we have sufficient materials and preparations, but at the same time we need to provide explanation to all the people, of all races and all religions, that the Government will not allow all these things to happen in our country. If they happen, we will take appropriate action to overcome them and ensure they don't happen again.

Question: Is it true Datuk Seri - the report which said several members of the group had escaped, were in Kuala Lumpur and tried to create trouble?

Answer: They actually did not escape. We had early information that a group of three or five people had taken a weapon, a M16 rocket launcher, out of Sauk. They had other plans and their aim was to create chaos by shooting at a certain place to create suspicions that our country is not safe. They actually brought the M16 out. There were also reports that they shot at a Hindu temple, they shot at the Carlsberg factory. But they didn't know how to use the weapon properly, so nothing happened.

The Government admits that we didn't report this matter before because we don't want the people to feel anxious when we can deal with it. Those who escaped have all been arrested and all the weapons too have been recovered. Police quickly identified who were involved and were able to determine where the weapons were hidden. The weapons were actually hidden in Sungai Petani.

Question: A small section in our society is strange. Some are now saying that what happened was planned by the Government, and describe it as an Umno drama. What actually happened? Was the Government involved in the Gerik rams heist?

Answer: I had said at the very outset that there would be attempts to whitewash or absolve this crime. We have now seen that to protect those who directly or indirectly sympathised, or were involved, with the movement, they make the accusation that this was planned by the Government. This is a most strange accusation as it does not make sense at all. To plan this, we need to cooperate with criminals who hate the Government very much, and tell them to do something that expose them to possible death, or is likely to get them a heavy sentence if they are caught. If we want to tell such people to do something for the Government, they must be a strong supporters who are truly loyal to the Government. But there is no proof whatsoever that (the group members) are strong government supporters. On the contrary, there are indications that they sympathise with opposition parties. Can it be that opposition party people are willing to sacrifice their interests for this Government drama? We cannot play-act. Besides, this involved killings, torture. This is not something that can be planned by others to be done by other people. This is the work of the very people themselves.

Question: Apparently, the objective of the drama is to facilitate the Government to act against opposition political parties, particularly PAS -- that the Government wants to use this episode to prevent political parties including PAS from including the word Islam in their names. Even if the Government wishes to ban political parties from using the Islamic name is there a need to resort to such justification?

Answer: There is no need for that at all. We've repeatedly said the inclusion of the word Islam in a party's name is confusing the people so

much so that they resort to doing unwise things which in fact run contrary to Islam. We don't have to resort to killing to justify the action. I think the people are aware of the prevailing negative developments, which started small but have since expanded and is posing a major problem for us.

If previously the inclusion of the word Islam in a party's name did not have much effect because the people knew it is political party and not a religion, we have now reached a stage where the party is saying they are Islam and Islam is the party. This goes totally against Islamic teachings. We have now reached a most dangerous stage concerning the faith and danger to the national security.

Question: Will the Government ban the inclusion of the word Islam in the name of political parties?

Answer: We are studying this matter because we don't act in rash without reasons. But the people should know that they are actually exposed to a very big danger towards their faith, belief in Islam and also to their own safety.

Question: Can Datuk Seri tell what are measures taken to avoid this from happening?

Answer: Groups that deviate from the Islamic teachings, that try to spread their own interpretation are many in our country, there are also certain groups with intentions which could bring destruction to the country. But actions to be taken against them will depend on what they do. If we find them that what they are doing or their struggle is to destroy the country, we will take action. If they commit crime, the law will take its course, they will be charged in court for the crime they committed.

The problem is of some people who while demanding the rule of law but when the law is applied to them or their loved ones, they do not want the law to be used. This is totally different from the government's view because the government allows its members to be charged in court and sentenced to death. We will not defend even if it is a close friend. The law knows no friend or enemy.

Question: Action against criminals? There are many more groups, how do we tackle or face them?

Answer: Other groups, sometimes they are not dangerous. We need to study their activities, their intention and their movement. For example, the silat group only wish to learn the art of self defence. This is not wrong but if its intention is other than that, certainly wrong and we will take action against them. But we must really know what is their real intention.

Question: Besides the allegation that all this is staged by Umno and the government, there is another, a rather worrying and dangerous action, that is of several mosques holding "sembahyang hajat" and using Friday sermon to accuse the government of planning all this and of being cruel to the Al Ma'unah whose objective purportedly is to set up an Islam country according to their interpretation. What is the government doing against such actions?

Answer: Their action shows that they are obsessed with the group that they are willing to ignore the true teachings of Islam because this is a crime. Murder was committed, and torture was committed and there should not be anyone especially Muslims defending these people. But they defend these people because they hate the government so much and are willing to condone crime as long as the crime is directed at the government.

Religious intellectuals say this is against the teachings of Islam but we have people like imams who distribute leaflet condoning crime. They join a group of people who make it all right to spill the blood of other Muslims whom they considered as non-Muslims. This is deviation at its worse, because if we do that, Muslims will be divided because everyone will accuse another of not being a Muslim. The fact is they have no right to say that

the government is not Islamic.

Question: Isn't it a criminal offence to condone a crime by others?

Answer: It is a crime. In fact if we are present when the crime is committed, then we are considered as accomplices. This means that we also committed the crime and the government will prosecute if the public prosecutor finds that those who condone the crime are actually committing the crime.

Question: We have now seen clearly that there are people doing this and no action has been taken yet. This sends out a wrong message to the general public.

Answer: I regret if we are late. I believe the Attorney-General and the police will take action when they receive...they must follow certain procedures because if they make a wrong move this will become a technical error and the court will throw out the case. That's why the police are careful whenever they do anything, they must follow procedures so that when the case is heard in court there won't be any case being thrown out due to technical error. We see nowadays many cases being thrown out due to technical errors. The government is not keeping quiet but we leave it to the officers who are taking action.

Question: They are now under police detention, they will certainly be tried. When will the trial process take place?

Answer: I think the Public Prosecutor and police are gathering all clear evidence as the case must be presented to the court in complete detail because otherwise there are defence counsels who will be able to raise reasonable doubt, that is, on grounds of insufficient proof and these people will be free. That's why, before going to the court the police and Public Prosecutor must get all evidence to ensure that there is basis for the case and it is accepted by the court.

Question: If the politics of hatred is allowed to go unchecked what will be the effect on national security?

Answer: The politics of hatred in the beginning might not have instilled the feeling of hate among many people, but when such hatred is purposely inculcated every day by teachers, politicians, kindergarten teachers, school teachers and university lecturers...they only receive hate. It's human nature, when one has feelings of hate then they no longer think.

This leads us back to the pre-Islamic era, we know that the Arab tribes liked to wage war against each other because they hated each other. This feeling of hate came about due to incidents which occurred three or four generations ago.

We have reached the stage whereby certain groups hate the government and refuse to listen to any explanation. Only the feeling of hate. Whatever explanation we offer is rejected by them because (we are) Pharaohs, (we) are extremely cruel and so on.

Question: If it has reached to such level, what is the government's next move, more systematic and orderly to face the hate campaign.

Answer: We need repeated information. Maybe we cannot convince all. Maybe some will accept our explanation, we will approach them and talk to them from the start. Maybe from the schools, in fact if we find the kindergartens use to promote this hate against the government, we will take action against those who manage the kindergartens and we will try to identify the methods used.

For example, now there is effort to divide the Malays into two group using clothing as identity. Recently I discovered that those who hate the government wear white skullcap, those using the black skullcap are considered as supporting the government. These are the people to boycott.

They are so afraid that they join the group.

The Malays have been wearing the black skullcap, sort of an identity for our race but now there is effort and it has succeeded in splitting the Malays to two groups, one with the white skullcap and one with the black skullcap. In the past we also used white skullcap but not with the intention to divide us. Only certain people were white skullcap because they are God-fearing, because they become "lebai" and religious teacher for example but now...this makes people wearing white skullcap difficult to approach. When we try to explain to them, they are reluctant to accept our explanation and there are people who prevent others from meeting this people.

Question: This hate government campaign, is it there in the government and government agencies?

Answer: Actually we have announced that we intent to assimilate Islam values in the government. Following which government officers and staff hold religious lectures but what is stressed is not fine Islamic values like trustworthy, responsibility, keeping promises, pledges and so forth. On the other hand, they give some attention on how one's religious obligations and teachings of Islam. Then they accuse the government of not being Islamic. Why not Islamic? Because we do not implement the Hudud law. From there they go further to a stage where they really campaign to oppose the government and support the opposition.

Even now some of government officers including in the armed forces and the police who are taken in by this. They consider the government as not being Islamic and there is no need for them to keep to their promise and on the hand should strive to topple the government.

This is done because we have good intention of wanting to assimilate Islamic values among officers because we believe that we hold to Islamic values the government will become a government that is strong and bring progress to Muslims. But they change this dan turn it into an effort to say bad things and oppose the government.

Question: What will be done to correct the situation so that they can return to the fold of the government?

Answer: Now we have prohibited these religious lectures because they are not longer religious lectures, they have become political lecturers. What is banned is political lectures, not religious lectures.

We will hold religious lectures in a systematic way during working hours, maybe once every two weeks, truly religious lectures covering religious obligations and interpretation of the Quran, those connected to the work. Political lectures will not be held

Question: People are attracted to religious ceramah by one party but not interested in that by the government. This needs to be corrected first.

Answer: That is true, people like to hear bad things about others because it makes them feel good. When we see bad things about others, we feel we are better than them. So for this reason, they like to hear such lectures. On the other hand if we give lectures to improve them...they are not interest.

For that reason, sometimes we feel disappointed seeing so many people coming to hear lectures that are clearly spreading lies. These people are lying many times, today, tomorrow with another story, people believe them.

For example, the story about me falling from a horse in Argentina. There was also mentioned about me marrying a Chinese girl from Singapore. Now, people know it is not true but these people are repeating it, people believe also, it's good to hear bad things about others.

Question: What can we learn from Sauk?

Answer: Firstly, we now know that trouble will happen with the spread of lies by instilling the hate and anger against the government. We have mentioned many times and now it has happened where people were influenced

by this and willing to kill and torture others.

The lesson we got is that we cannot allow something to continue if we already know it will only bring trouble. We have earlier on stressed that the instilling of hatred in order to get support for ourselves is not good. The misuse of religion, misinterpretation of religion by saying that by doing this and that we can go heaven and so for, this is all not good and we prohibit it but many refused to accept what we say.

The lesson that we receive is that we need to listen to the truth and follow the truth. If Islam says that we have to be moderate, no compulsion, cannot act violently against other people, cannot create chaos, we should hold to the Islamic teachings.

The problem is that many people talk about Islam but do not follow Islamic teachings.

Question: Isn't the government giving priority on social science education as the inclination towards science and technology caused us to neglect social science. whether the government will ask the social science members to hold more reserach on issues like this?

Answer: I agree that we hold a separate study, we are not involved...only holding to the facts, to know hat had actually happend, what thinking had led to such incident. But a study like this is to give guidance to us.

We give them places to learn social science as we wanted to know how to deal with problems within our society. Without research by those not directly involved, we may get views inclined to those who write. For example if write for the party, then his views is influenced by the party and this is no longer the truth.

--BERNAMA
mny zs abg