

21 JUL 2000

Mahathir-Al-Ma'unah

AL-MA'UNAH GROUP HAS CLOSE TIES WITH PAS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, July 21 (Bernama) -- The deviationist Al-Ma'unah group, whose members were responsible for the weapons heist from two army camps in Gerik on July 2, has close links with PAS, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said the group committed criminal acts in Gerik and Sauk as it was inspired by PAS after being taken in by the ploys employed by the opposition party.

"We can no longer deny that the Al-Ma'unah got their inspiration from PAS and although they might not have been directed by the PAS party leader, they were influenced by the party's tactics," he told a press conference after chairing an Umno Supreme Council meeting here tonight.

The three-hour Supreme Council meeting at the Umno headquarters in the Putra World Trade Centre here discussed in detail the incident in Sauk and the deviationist Al-Ma'unah group.

Dr Mahathir said the group was influenced by the deceit of PAS such as its claims that the government led by Umno was "kafir" (unIslamic) and that the country was not Islamic while they must try to set up an Islamic state.

A group of the Al-Ma'unah members, posing as military personnel, had robbed more than a hundred firearms, explosives and ammunition from the Sungai Rui military post and the Batallion 304 Territorial Army Camp in Gerik, on July 2 before holing out in the jungles of Bukit Jenalek, Sauk, about 25 km from Kuala Kangsar, Perak.

They later took four hostages and killed two of them before all 27 members of the group, who were holing out there, surrendered to the security forces on July 6.

The Prime Minister said the government had obtained facts on the relationship between PAS and the Al-Ma'unah group.

"Actually, Amin (Mohamed Amin Mohd Razali, leader of the Al-Ma'unah group) came from a family who were PAS members, living in a kampung dominated by PAS, all his family were PAS members and it was very clear that he was influenced by the PAS views," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the action taken by Mohamed Amin was prompted by his hatred for and anger against Umno and the government as well as his intention to bring down the government by force.

He said Umno Supreme Council members were tonight briefed on the incident in Sauk and the Al-Ma'unah group and they in turn will explain the issue to the people.

On opposition allegations that the incidents in Gerik and Sauk were staged by Umno, Dr Mahathir said it was preposterous.

"They claim the people who went to the camps were bearded and thus did not look like soldiers but the information we have is that these people had actually shaved off their beards," he said.

He said the government also had information that before attempting the weapons heist, some members of the Al-Ma'unah were in Bukit Jenalek to set up base and only the members that went to the army camps were dressed in army fatigues.

He said some members of the gang also left Bukit Jenalek to try to create chaos by using a grenade launcher to fire at a temple and a brewery in the Klang Valley.

"What they did were all planned and the allegation that it was a play by the government is absurd," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who yesterday met one hostage who survived, Sjn Mohamed Shah Ahmad, was told Mohamed Shah was also tortured by the gang who tortured and murdered Sjn R. Sagadevan and trooper Mathew anak Medan.

"He (Mohamed Shah) was tied to a tree. On the first night, he was not allowed to sit nor to sleep. They had a gun pointed at him, they fired near to his right ear so much so he is a little hard of hearing until now.

"On several occasions they showed him bullets, placed the bullet in a firearm and pointed it at him as though taking aim," he said.

Dr Mahathir said although Mohamed Shah and another hostage were spared, Mohamed Shah believed then that he too might be killed.

"This is not a play, those who accused Umno of staging a play know they are wrong and that was why they went on the defensive early. A day after the incident, Nik Aziz (Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, the PAS spiritual leader) was already talking of a play staged by Umno," he said.

The statement by Nik Abdul Aziz is now well received by PAS supporters just like the response to his statement earlier that God indulged in profanity.

The opposition raised issues such as how the military post in Sungai Rui did not signal the military camp on the arms robbery and that it was impossible that such a large quantity of firearms could be loaded onto three four-wheel drive (4WD) Pajeros to confuse the people.

Dr Mahathir said the military post could not contact the military camp concerned because their radio communication equipment had been taken by the robbers while the three vehicles could certainly accommodate all the firearms and the people as well.

A white paper on the incident in Sauk would be released as soon as possible, he said.

Asked whether the government would ban the Al-Ma'unah group, he said the government would study closely the evidence available before taking further action.

-- BERNAMA  
AFY THG AO