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Lunas Assemblyman Fernandez shot dead

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BUKIT MERTAJAM, Sat. - Lunas State Assemblyman Dr Joe Fernandez was today gunned down point-blank by two men on a motorcycle along busy Jalan Maju here while driving alone to his nearby Taman Bukit home.

Dr Fernandez, 54, who was shot twice in the head and once in the abdomen, was pronounced dead by doctors at the Bukit Mertajam Specialists' Centre at 3pm.

He leaves a wife, Dr Rosemary Lourdes and daughter, Ophelia Anne, 23, a final year medical student.

State Deputy Chief Police Officer Datuk Abu Kassim Md Nor said Dr Fernandez was earlier caught in the lunch time traffic jam near the Jalan Maju-Jalan Harapan junction when the shooting took place at 2.30pm.

Relating the incident, Abu Kassim said the killers had stopped their motorcycle alongside Dr Fernandez's Nissan Terrano before the pillion rider alighted from the machine.

The gunman, whom Abu Kassim described as "big size", then drew out his gun and fired three shots at Dr Fernandez who was talking on his handphone with an employee at his nearby Jalan Kulim clinic.

After pulling the trigger, the gunman coolly walked back to his waiting accomplice before the duo sped away on their machine leaving behind scores of shocked by-standers who witnessed the incident.

"It was a cold-blooded killing ... he was caught by surprise and did not have the chance to react at all when the gunman approached him and opened fire," he told a Press conference.

Police have yet to ascertain the motive of the killing of Dr Fernandez, who is also Kedah MIC deputy chief.

"We have a brief description of the two men and are now conducting investigations into the murder.

"But it is certainly not robbery," Abu Kassim said.

Asked about the type of gun used in the killing, Abu Kassim said it could be a revolver as police did not find any spent bullet at the scene of the murder.

Earlier, one of the clinic staff rushed out of the clinic to the doctor's aid when he heard loud shots over the phone.

Shocked to see his employer slumped in a pool of blood inside the four-wheel drive, the man, whose identity was withheld by police, took over the wheel and drove to the specialist centre.

Dr Fernandez, however, died 30 minutes after admission to the hospital.

Abu Kassim said police believed that two motorists - in a Nissan Sunny and a Perodua Kenari - who were immediately behind Dr Fernandez's vehicle could assist them in their investigation.

Meanwhile, more than 300 friends and family members gathered at the Bukit Mertajam Hospital mortuary after learning of Dr Fernandez's tragic death.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is in Langkawi, expressed his condolence to the bereaved family.

He said such incidents involving politicians were rare in Malaysia.

He said only during the Emergency did such politically-motivated shootings happen but had not recurred for a long time.

"I'm saddened by the incident," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that he would get more information on the motive for the killing.

Expressing condolence to the family of the late Dr Fernandez, Dr Mahathir who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, said the incident did not mean that elected representatives were targets of killers.

Asked whether police protection would be provided for elected representatives following the incident, he said this was an "unusual" case and there might be other reasons.

Menteri Besar Datuk Syed Razak Syed Zain also expressed shock over the death. He said the late Dr Fernandez had a good track record during his tenure as State Assemblyman since 1995.

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