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Mahathir-Histrionics

OPPOSITION TRYING TO ABSOLVE AL MA'UNAH, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, July 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the opposition is trying to absolve the Al-Ma'unah group of the criminal act of staging the July 2 Gerik arms heist and the Sauk hostage episode by charging that it was the government's own doing.

Dr Mahathir said that from earlier on he had mentioned that there would be attempts to whitewash or absolve the crime by those involved directly or indirectly and to evoke sympathy for the criminals.

"We have now seen that to protect those directly or indirectly involved or those sympathising with the group, they hurl accusations that the government planned the heist," Dr Mahathir said in special interview telecast simultaneously tonight by government and local private stations.

The interview panel comprised University of Malaya Deputy Vice-Chancellor for student affairs Datuk Dr Firdaus Abdullah, Utusan Melayu Group editor-in-chief Datuk Khalid Mohamed and TV3 senior general manager for news and current affairs Chamil Wariya.

Dr Mahathir said the accusations did not make sense at all and moreover the government would never at all get involved in criminal acts which resulted in the murder of two members of the security forces.

Fifteen men posing as army officers stole a huge arms cache, including 100 M16 and Steyr assault rifles, machine-guns and thousands of rounds of ammunition from two military camps in Gerik in the early Sunday incident of July 2.

Thirteen others later joined them and holed up in Bukit Jenalik in Sauk near Kuala Kangsar where they took four hostages, two of whom they brutally murdered.

One of the gang members was killed in a shoot-out with security forces and the remaining 27 later surrendered. They were all identified as belonging to the Al-Ma'unah religious deviationist and mystical cult.

The prime minister said it was beyond imagination that the government could be involved in such crime as it would entail working hand-in-hand with men led by a criminal with utmost hatred towards the government.

As for the criminals, it was also unthinkable that by collaborating they would make themselves vulnerable to being killed or, if arrested, be liable for heavy punishment, the prime minister said.

Dr Mahathir said: "If we were to ask such people to do something for the government, they would first have to be strong supporters of and truly loyal to the government."

"On the contrary, there are indications that the criminals sympathise with opposition parties. Can it be that opposition supporters are willing to sacrifice selfish interests for government's histrionics?" the prime minister asked.

There was no way that the government could be play-acting more so when the episode involved murder and torture, he said.

"This is not a matter of other people carrying out what others planned for them. The very people who planned it were the same people who carried it out," he said.

On claims that the government's play-acting was to justify action against the opposition, in particular PAS for using Islam as a party name, Dr Mahathir said the government need not have to do that.

"There's no need for that at all. We've repeatedly said using Islam for a party name is creating much confusion so much so the people resorted to doing unwise things which in fact run contrary to Islam.

"We don't have to resort to killing to seek justification for that (disallowing the term Islam in party names)," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was convinced that the people were aware of the

prevalent negative effects (of having Islam for a party name) which now have posed a major problem to the country.

Asked whether the government would now ban the term Islam from being part of any party names, Dr Mahathir said the government was examining the matter.

"We're thoroughly studying the matter as we don't want to be hasty in taking action without any reasons.

"However the people should be aware that they are now being exposed to very serious threat to their faith, to their belief in Islam and also their personal security," he said.

During the hour-long interview, the prime minister clarified at length the use of the term Islam for party names which in the past, he said, did not bring about much impact as the people then knew that it referred to political parties not the religion.

However, the present situation has reached a stage where the party concerned could claim that "it is Islam and Islam is the party", he said.

"This is totally against Islamic teachings as we all know that Islam is God's religion. There is no mention of a certain party as being next to Islam and God, none whatsoever," he said.

Dr Mahathir said repercussions of adopting Islam for a party name has reached a "very dangerous stage" involving the faith and national security.

He was also asked about mosques holding special prayers for the well-being of the Al Ma'unah group and about Friday sermons being used to accuse the government of cruelty against the group whose purported objective was to set up an Islamic state.

Dr Mahathir said the special prayers and the Friday sermons showed their obsession with the group to the extent of bypassing the true teachings of Islam.

"Murder has been committed and no one, especially Muslims, should defend these people (the Al Ma'unah group). Those defending them hated the government so much that they condone crimes as long the crimes are targeted at the government," he said.

According to the prime minister, although scholars of Islam themselves have given their views that the group had acted against Islamic teachings, there were still people distributing leaflets defending the criminal acts.

"They belong to the category that condones killing of Muslims whom they brand as unIslamic. This is a serious deviation since it will split Muslims who will accuse one another of being unIslamic," he said.

The prime minister said condoning criminal acts in itself was a crime and the government would prosecute those involved if the public prosecutor found these people were themselves the perpetrators or accomplices.

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