

20 JUL 2000

Mahathir-Al-Maunah

PAS MEMBERS FORM BULK OF AL-MA'UNAH DEVIATIONIST GROUP, SAYS PM

ALOR SETAR, July 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said most of the 1,800 members of the Al-Ma'unah deviationist group are also PAS members.

He said he had to make such disclosure as PAS had charged that the Al-Ma'unah group has links with Umno.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said this when opening the 2000 Kedah Umno convention here today.

Dr Mahathir said PAS alleged that Umno collaborated with the Al-Ma'unah group and stage-managed the July 2 Gerik arms heist and the Sauk hostage episode.

He said the government at first refrained from disclosing Al-Ma'unah's link with PAS and that Al-Ma'unah is a militant wing of PAS.

"But today PAS tries to link Umno with Al-Ma'unah," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Al-Ma'unah was bent on setting up an Islamic state in Malaysia whereas, he said, Malaysia is already an Islamic state.

Last July 2, members of the group robbed a huge cache of arms, including more than 100 assault rifles and machine-guns, from two military camps in Perak and took four men hostage.

The gang members brutally executed two of the hostages before surrendering four days later.

Dr Mahathir said: "The only thing is that the Al-Ma'unah group is rather stupid in wanting to set up an Islamic country in one that is inherently Islamic and to topple the government through armed revolt," he said.

Speaking at a press conference later, Dr Mahathir said PAS symbols were all over at Al-Ma'unah premises.

"They make up the extremist group among PAS supporters. Although the Al-Ma'unah is not PAS-owned, the members are people influenced by anti-government campaign carried out by PAS.

"Al-Ma'unah is a direct design of PAS' hatred campaign against the government and also PAS' struggle to establish Islamic government and as the result this people reject PAS' relatively mild way and try to do the same thing through violence," Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said he also did not discount the possibility of Umno members being Al-Ma'unah followers.

"There may be Umno members but we don't know how many. There are strayed Umno members also aspiring to set up an Islamic state," he said.

Asked whether the government would act against PAS, Dr Mahathir said: "The government will not take action against the party. But it is studying PAS' campaigning which has done much damage like that by Al-Ma'unah,"

To another question, the prime minister said it seemed PAS too was also play-acting about its members' involvement in the Al-Ma'unah group.

"PAS has said if Al-Ma'unah members happen to be PAS members, they only need to leave Al-Ma'unah and need not leave PAS and this means PAS accepts Al-Ma'unah people.

"At the same time, PAS claims that Al-Ma'unah members collaborated with Umno to stage the hostage-taking episode and murder people," said the prime minister.

Asked whether, as an aftermath of the Sauk hostage-taking and killing incident, the government would ban political parties from using the word Islam as party name, Dr Mahathir said it would study the matter.

He said many people were confused by PAS' slogan that "PAS is Islam and Islam is Pas" whereas that ran contrary to Islamic teachings.

On warning by PAS leaders of dire consequences should the government impose the ban, Dr Mahathir said the government would continue to maintain order and national security.

Dr Mahathir directed Umno leaders and members to go on an awareness campaign aimed at guiding back strayed PAS members to the correct path.

These Umno leaders and members would also be asked explain to the public about how the Umno jihad differed from that of the Al-Ma'unah, he said.

The Umno jihad (holy war) emphasised Ummah's unity and advancement and Muslim mastery of knowledge, technology and parity with the other races, he said.

"Our jihad also enables us to defend the rights of oppressed Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo," he said.

"There is no reason why they should overthrow the government which is considered by the world as a great model of an Islamic country," Dr Mahathir said.

To another question, Dr Mahathir said the government would also act against groups or individuals organising special prayers in mosques seeking divine protection for Al-Ma'unah members now being detained by the police.

-- BERNAMA

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