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Norian-Interview (Transcript)

SPECIAL INTERVIEW GIVEN BY IGP NORIAN MAI ON THE SAUK INCIDENT

KUALA LUMPUR, July 23 (Bernama) -- The following is a transcript of the special interview given by Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai on "Sauk: National Security" which was aired by TV1 today.

In the 45-minute programme, he was interviewed by RTM journalist Hashim Abu Hanifah and New Straits Times Group Editor Ahmad Talib.

Question: As the Inspector-General of Police, in charge of public security, it is the responsibility of Tan Sri to look after peace in the country. So in the Gerik issue, Tan Sri as the Chief of Operations had smashed this group of criminals. So it means when the tragedy happened, Tan Sri was the first person to get the information. What was the action taken to mobilise the security forces to tackle this issue?

Answer: When told of the incident that morning, the first action taken was to inform the Home Minister (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) because this case was unusual, and then to direct the Police Chief in the West and officers in the West to go to the scene to verify or find out the actual situation before planning follow-up actions.

After that I rushed there to find out and follow subsequent developments.

Question: Since this camp at Batu 4 from where 116 weapons were stolen is located near the border area, did police immediately act to seal off this area?

Answer: Roadblocks were mounted based on the action taken by the Kuala Kangsar District Police Chief with the aim of preventing any movement of the firearms too far from the Gerik area.

Question: After Tan Sri informed the Home Minister of the incident, what instructions were given by the minister since this was a major incident and there might have been specific orders given to tackle this matter.

Answer: The order given by the Home Minister mainly concerned the worry of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that this was a case with wide and long-term implications on the country's security, and he directed that all necessary actions be taken to recover the weapons and action be taken against those responsible.

Question: Apart from the Home Minister, Tan Sri is also close to the Prime Minister, so what was his reaction or security instructions which the Prime Minister himself might have ordered to be taken in this case?

Answer: I met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that night to explain our views on how the incident could have happened, who might have committed it, their aims and the likes. At that stage, those were merely views because they have not got concrete information on who was responsible. The Prime Minister himself conveyed his fears that this incident could be the start of something bigger.

From the explanation and opinions given by him, I was certain that he was very concerned over the incident.

Question: This incident was handled well, brought to an end without bloodshed which could become an issue. I could see that the police and military were cooperating. Perhaps Tan Sri would like to explain how this cooperation was implemented?

Answer: Actually this was one operation which involved many parties, not only the military but also others like the Information Department, local officers, penghulus and elected representatives who have all contributed to the implementation of this operation.

This operation was also a police operation, as provided for in the laws. But provisions under the Criminal Procedure Code also allow the police to seek the help of any party deemed able to help resolve or take action on a case like this.

Based on these provisions, we invited the military and other departments to extend help, like the Information Department in making appeals to the criminals holed up in their camp. So these roles were implemented after we held discussions involving all parties.

The information at that stage was limited. I knew that only a portion of the firearms seized comprised heavy weapons and at that stage we were also not sure how many of the criminals were trained army personnel.

In that kind of situation, the most suitable party to throw a cordon around this group was the army because compared to the police they have the expertise in heavy weapons. So we asked the military to encircle this group when we have concrete information that they were in Bukit Jenalek.

Question: Tan Sri, the public might want to know why the police were involved when the incident occurred in army camps.

Answer: To the police, it was a criminal act, irrespective of whether it happened outside or inside the army camps. So, a `kes darah (where blood is shed) must be dealt with according to the laws for criminal cases. Because of this, investigation was carried at the camps as usual and a case like this was not unusual. The investigation was related to ours. Later when it was established that the raiders were outside, in a certain area, we would continue (our investigation) after arrests have been made.

Question: Tan Sri, ...didn't the Special Branch get wind that this was going to happen, otherwise I fear that it would occur again?

Answer: We should review what we have. First, the Al-Ma'unah is a legitimate organisation under the Societies Act and second, their original objectives are not against the country's laws. As such, it cannot be regarded as breaking the country's laws. Normally, the Special Branch does not keep itself informed of all organisations registered under the Societies Act. There are over 20,000 registered organisations. The police will be interested if their activities are detrimental to national security. If the activities are ordinary or involving the question of faith, we will not interfere, but if there are signs that national security could be threatened, the police keep watch and if necessary take appropriate actions.

In the incident in Gerik, when the location of the criminals was found, within several hours the police were able to establish that it was the Al-Ma'unah...the question was why prior to the incident the villagers, who might have seen unusual activities, did not report to the police.

The Al-Ma'unah abandoned its objectives early this year and the desire to carry out militant activities only came about in March and only confined to its headquarters in Klang.

In Sauk, these people only went once or twice to hold campaigns on organising a camp and this camp did not violate any regulations.

Police were able to detect them fast because the local community saw the goings-on and reported to the police. Police sent personnel to verify the matter and they included two people who were taken hostage, and one ended up being murdered. So from the initial information from members of society, we could identify the group responsible and from there we widened our investigation to trace the organisation, members and so on.

Question: So Tan Sri, maybe because of Al-Ma'unah and after what happened that day, the police Special Branch would be empowered to get information even if it concerns religion. Would this enable the Special Branch to coordinate investigations at an earlier stage with other departments?

Answer: If we have information that raises suspicion, whether from the

aspect of security or religion, we will take further action. If it is from the aspect of religion, we will refer to JAKIM, if in Kuala Lumpur, to study and if it is strictly security in nature we will tackle it in various ways. We do not immediately take action, we need to study, gather evidence to show that the organisation has done something which violated the laws of the country.

Question: Earlier, Tan Sri said that this group became active early this year. What was actually the motive of this group which led them to hole up in Sauk?

Answer: The main aim of the Al-Ma'unah leader was to create a Mujahideen struggle in Malaysia, and in fact he referred to himself as the head of the Malaysian Mujahideen group that was supposedly out to fight against all forms of wrongdoings within and outside Malaysia. So, even though in the early stages the attraction to join the group was to learn mystical powers, after some time the leaders would pick suitable students to join the elite group, and this was based on the spirit of martyrdom and to oppose all forms of cruelty and torture on the Muslim community through a militant struggle.

So the development in this organisation was in stages, not straight away becoming a member and adopting the spirit of martyrdom or jihad. In the early stage, it looked good and the spirit of jihad was gradually imbued.

Question: So were they influenced by militant groups, if not in the country maybe militant groups outside the country, for example?

Answer: They were influenced, from our observation so far, by what they read, speeches made at mosques and cassettes put on sale expounding jihad and martyrdom. Through this process, the militant spirit was gradually instilled in those followers who were interested, there were some who were not interested.

Question: When Tan Sri mentioned about speeches at mosques and the like, I got the impression that Al-Ma'unah had become a movement that was not 100 percent political or religious but appeared able to help a political movement to uphold the Islamic religion. Although this struggle should be through democracy, Al-Ma'unah might wish to do it with a more militant approach, is this right, Tan Sri?

Answer: Right in the sense that the Al-Ma'unah struggle or movement had fanned the spirit of martyrdom and jihad among some of its active members. Whether this was linked with other countries or not is not clear at this stage. What we know is that there were no direct ties with foreign organisations; they only looked at, for example, incidents in Chechnya, Kosovo, southern Philippines, maybe incidents in Aceh. These are signs that the teachings of Islam had been changed and because of this they took it upon themselves to overcome these problems not only outside the country but also in the country.

Question: Back to the question of whether there were elements like Friday sermons or the like which inspired this group to oppose the government or whether it was their idealism which was inclined towards committing daring acts to oppose the government and so on?

Answer: The top echelon of this group had plans to start militant opposition in the country with the hope that they would be the prime mover for other groups to help in efforts to topple the government.

Question: This incident has raised all sorts of polemics to society and it was said that it had affected national security. Some also claimed that the Sauk incident was not a tragedy and that it was orchestrated. Could Tan Sri explain?

Answer: My reaction to the claim about it being orchestrated (sandiwara) was that this was a wild and suspicious statement because I, as someone involved from day one to the end, knew for sure that it could not

be stage-managed because it involved deaths, involved so many people. How could it be said to be orchestrated?

I think some quarters made this sandiwara allegations based on wrong assumptions, like the criminals appeared to sport goatees although the army said they impersonated army officers.

Our investigations showed that before going to the two camps in Sauk, some of them were directed to shave and cut their long hair. They went with some sporting goatees but these people were seated in the vehicles. Those who emerged from the vehicles were clean-shaven and can be taken for army personnel. Then there were people who questioned how could that amount of weapons and 20 people be accommodated in three vehicles. The facts we gathered showed that these three vehicles could carry 20 people. The stolen weapons did not reach one thousand, the number of firearms including M16, steyr, MPMG and other weapons did not even touch 120 and the ammunition seized numbered about 7,000. It was not a problem to cart them away in three vehicles. There was also an argument that why should they hide in Bukit Jenalek which is so near army camps. This was actually due to the group's belief that in this area they were protected, and they considered it a "liberated area" from control by any quarters. This is because they believed that they had the powers to be shielded in this place. So the question of choice of hideout did not arise.

Question: These facts, if explained point by point, showed that the claims of sandiwara were baseless because a police detective was killed and a soldier was also murdered. Why did the accusations arise, were they deliberately raised to sidetrack this issue and to close another issue?

Answer: It is difficult for me to comment. In my opinion, the notion or new allegation of sandiwara had its own objectives and interests.

Question: Tan Sri, claims that the incident was stage-managed were serious allegations which were aimed at undermining the credibility of the authorities. What action would the police take to tackle this matter?

Answer: We have received one or two police reports on this matter and it was being looked into.

Question: Tan Sri, how long would the investigation take and upon completion would the findings be handed to the board of inquiry appointed to probe this case.

Answer: Our investigation will be tightened and if there is enough evidence, we will seek advice from the public prosecutor for further action.

Question: How do the police view this talk about sandiwara when they had worked so hard to settle this problem and restored calm so that the people need not worry about a recurrence?

In Tan Sri's view, was the integrity of the security forces brought into question when this issue was politicised and linked to the negligence of the military?

Answer: I am disappointed by such allegations and I believe my men also felt the same. For now, we are trying very hard to maintain calm and to resolve this case as soon as possible. So, if this contribution was not appreciated or was belittled, that would mean disappointment. But as a disciplined force, we take this in our stride and give our views through specific channels.

Question: What are the important lessons we can learn from the Sauk incident?

Answer: I think in the Sauk incident, it demanded that we must be ready at all times, that a breach in security could happen to the police or the army...we must remember that it was something unusual, the first in our history. I believe, after the incident, the army and the police will take appropriate steps to ensure no one would take our weapons and our

institutions will not be intruded. This is no easy task because we have many police stations all over the country...we have to be very careful especially when it involves firearms.

Question: A day after the heist, according to reports in the newspapers recently, a group of Al-Ma'unah members slipped through roadblocks, carried with them weapons to Kuala Lumpur and shot at several targets. Did this show that they would go to any extent to achieve their objectives?

Answer: What happened was that after robbing the two camps, their leader directed a group to go to Kuala Lumpur and create trouble. At that time we did not know and had not set up roadblocks between Bukit Janalek and Kuala Lumpur. The directive to this group was to shoot at several targets with the hope of creating chaos in the country. Once chaos started, the group would announce over the internet that a holy war had begun, and they anticipated that they would be joined by others who opposed the government.

The shooting of the three targets was the first event, to be followed by calls over the internet for others to join in in creating chaos.

Question: So it was all professionally done...did the Al-Ma'unah group have outside support, not just in Sauk but also other parts of the country? Would it be a threat to national security?

Answer: I don't have proof at this stage to say that they have links with this organisation or that group in our country. They knew that many were talking of dying a martyr, opposing the government and so forth, holy war. They hoped that this group would help in creating chaos started by the Al-Ma'unah but it did not happen as we all know.

Question: Are those sympathising with the group still active?

Answer: We discovered that the group has about 1,700 members. We have also interviewed the ordinary members to determine whether they can be considered a threat. We have to be fair to Al-Ma'unah as some had no idea as to what was going on at the upper level of the group. So we are doing this screening in stages, and I am confident this could be resolved effectively within a short period of time.

Question: There was a report in the newspapers today about an explosion in Klang, was it related to the Al-Ma'unah?

Answer: Probably not. I'm not sure but we are still waiting for the report, still interviewing witnesses and as such we cannot conclude whether it was related to Al-Ma'unah or not.

Question: Tan Sri, what advice do you have for people on how to treat rumours?

Answer: In cases such as this, my advice to the public is don't believe in rumours...they must have confidence in the security forces, this is important as shown in the Sauk incident. The people immediately reported to the police of anything suspicious in their area. This is important, giving of information. It helps the police in their action. This was clearly effective in Sauk. I received full cooperation from all quarters in Sauk.

Question: Where were the police when Army Field Commander Lt Jen Datuk Seri Zaini Mohd Said went into the group's hideout? He was almost killed.

Answer: Actually on that day, we, or I as director (of operations), had decided that the case had reached a stage where it must be resolved the same day. As such, at noon I was already at the Jenalek school and (Defence Minister) Datuk Najib Tun Razak was there, Datuk Seri Zaini was there and so were several other senior officers including the police, brigade commander and so forth. Our strategy, to my belief, was paying off. They were already weak, physically. Preventing them from getting any sleep. We knew they had food, water but humans cannot stand without sleep.

The whole night before, they could not get any sleep due to our harassment right to sunrise. Then we arranged for their mothers and

children to plead to them and we also made preparations to bring their wives too. Then we took other measures such as playing songs. This was to break their concentration.

In cases such as this, the leader played a major role, controlling the minds of those near him and we can break this. From noon to 12.30pm, we were already confident that it was only a matter of time before they surrender but at the same time I had fixed a deadline, meaning if there was no surrender during that time we would have to take other action and this was to let them think over and we continued (broadcasting) the appeals from my officers, military officers and their wives.

In fact, we sent five officers to talk to them about security, religion and their nonsensical struggle and it made them felt uneasy. Two hours before it ended, my officers were already in the hideout and talking to Amin (Mohamad Amin Mohd Razali) and the rest of the group...to me, they had succeeded in convincing Amin to lay down his arms and surrender or else the result would be worse.

So when it was time for Datuk Zaini and his men to go in, it was also in the final stage and the police were represented by General Operations Force Northern Brigade Commander SAC II Abdul Hadi Mahmud, but the group had sustained injuries, that was why five came out, then six and finally the rest.

Datuk Zaini went in with my blessing. This was because his presence (could speed up an end to the crisis) was on the request of the group's leader who wanted to meet Datuk Zaini.

-- BERNAMA  
SSA ABG YBY