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Apology-AP

AP JOURNALIST ASKED TO APOLOGISE TO DR MAHATHIR OVER ARTICLE

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 9 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister's Office has demanded that an Associated Press (AP) journalist and the news organisation issue a public apology to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for an incorrect article attributed to the Prime Minister on the United States-led attacks on Afghanistan.

"Given the far-reaching consequences of Mr (Sean) Yoong's mistakes, we demand that Mr Yoong and Associated Press issue a correction and a public apology to the Prime Minister of Malaysia," it said in a statement today.

Yoong has stated in his report: 'Mahathir repeated calls for a summit of world leaders to reach an internationally acceptable definition of terrorism, and he criticised Israel. "If they wanted to take action, they should pick the right people," Mahathir said of the U.S. and British strikes. "I would support them if they wanted to take terrorist action against Israel because Israel has shot dead many Palestinians. For us, those are the terrorists."'

The Prime Minister's Office said the statement was incorrect and mischievous as Dr Mahathir was clearly not referring to the US and British air strikes in his statement regarding Israel.

It said the incorrect article by Yoong was picked up by several foreign newspapers including the Asian Wall Street Journal, The Independent and The Belfast Telegraph, to name a few.

The statement said the correct translation of Dr Mahathir's remarks, which were made in response to a Parliamentary question on terrorism, and as recorded in the Parliament's Hansard of Oct 8, 2001 was this:

'These terrorist acts that were carried out were supposedly part of a jihad. Maybe it was caused because the perpetrators had been victims of terrorism themselves and they wanted to retaliate. But what is unacceptable is that others too were made victims including those from Malaysia who had not committed any terrorism against the Palestinians. Those who had committed terrorism against the Palestinians were the Israelis. Retaliate against Israel then. Those who were killed in attacks on the WTC (World Trade Centre) building included many foreigners who had nothing to do with the terrorist acts committed by the Israeli authorities. Therefore, if they wanted to take any action, they should pick on those who had acted against them, and I would support them if they had committed these terrorist acts against Israel because Israel has killed many Palestinians.'

The Prime Minister's office said Yoong, intentionally or otherwise, had chosen to take Dr Mahathir's statement out of context and referred the statement to the US and British attacks on Afghanistan when this was clearly not the case.

It said it was quite clear from the Hansard entry that Dr Mahathir was referring to the attacks on the WTC in New York.

"At no time did the prime minister urge world leaders or US and Britain to attack Israel as was clearly implied in Mr Yoong's article.

"Furthermore, while the Prime Minister had stated that Israel has committed what we perceive to be terrorist acts against Palestinians, nowhere in his answer did he state that Israelis were terrorists," the statement said.

It said if Yoong was present at Parliament when Dr Mahathir was speaking, there should not be any excuse for the errors that he had committed.

The Sept 11 attacks on the WTC in New York and the Pentagon in Washington which killed thousands of people prompted the US and Britain to launch air strikes against Afghanistan where Saudi-born millionaire Osama bin Laden, who the US suspect was responsible for the attacks against US, is hiding.

-- BERNAMA

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