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Mahathir-Terrorists

DECISION TO USE ISA ON EXTREMISTS PROVEN RIGHT, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the government's decision to use the Internal Security Act (ISA) on extremists has proven to be right as other countries are carrying out similar action following the Sept 11 terrorist attacks in the United States.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had experience in dealing with terrorists 42 years ago, against the communist guerrillas, long before the terrorist attacks in the US.

"When we use the ISA to stop the terrorists, we were cursed as undemocratic, unjust and all that, but now they are doing exactly what we are doing," he told reporters after opening the 30th Gerakan delegates' conference here.

"So, in a way, we are a hub in dealing with terrorists," he said, jokingly.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington left some 6,300 people missing and presumed dead.

The Prime Minister was also asked about a project given to Omar bin Laden, the brother of US prime suspect in the terrorist attacks Osama bin Laden, during the construction of the KL International Airport (KLIA).

He said that Omar was a businessman involved not only in the KLIA project but also the prawn project in Kerpan, Kedah, before it was taken over by a government company.

He was also involved in building mosques in Mecca and Medina, he said.

"They have many children (in the family), 50 over children because they practise polygamy. Just because a member of the family is a terrorist, that doesn't mean the whole family are terrorists," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Omar and other travellers were always welcomed to Malaysia unless they were on the authorities' black list and had committed criminal acts here or have extradition procedures against them.

"Even if their names are bin Laden, they can still come through," he said.

Dr Mahathir, however, lamented that several countries including in Asia had been singling out travellers with Arabic or Malay names.

He said that many Malays travelling in foreign airlines had been subjected to a lot of questioning by the authorities as their names have the "bin", similar to the Arabs.

"Like Mahathir bin Mohamad, so they think bin Mohamad is a relative of (Osama) bin Laden," said the Prime Minister.

On Umno adopting a more multicultural front, Dr Mahathir said that the Malay-based party had initiated the move as was evident by the presence of among others, Chinese and Christians, in Umno.

"A Christian priest, John Ghani, has made a speech in Umno," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said that the move towards multiculturalism in Umno must be implemented slowly and gradually as people do not easily forget their ethnic origins.

"When you want to do something, you want to lead and still have people following you. But if you lead too fast and you'll look behind, there is nobody following you. It is a slow process," he said.

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