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Mahathir-ISA

DETENTION UNDER ISA PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE: PM

KUALA LUMPUR, April 12 (Bernama) -- The detention of seven people under the Internal Security Act (ISA) is to prevent violence and damage during the opposition's proposed gathering on April 14, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said police believed that violence resulting in damage could occur as a result of the proposed demonstration planned for this Saturday.

"Police have decided that they are not going to deal with the demonstration as this demonstration can bring about violence and we do not know what kind of damage can be done," he said.

Speaking to reporters after launching a dental filling called Silverfil at the Technology Park Malaysia here, he said police had already made a statement that they had evidence about a plan to use explosives and the like, "so we don't want that to happen."

He said police were responsible for the security of the country and that those arrested so happened to be opposition leaders.

"We accept legitimate opposition, those who use normal democratic procedure ... we don't think demonstration and violence is a democratic procedure," he said.

Asked about the international backlash as a result of the detention, he said: "As usual, the foreign media will question us...they have never seen anything good in us even if we are nice. We have a duty to our country... they can go and fry their faces."

Over the last two days the police have detained seven people, including Parti Keadilan Nasional Youth chief Mohamad Ezam Mohamed Nor, Keadilan vice-president Chua Tian Chang and supreme council member Saari Sungib, its national youth vice-chairman M. Gobalakrishnan and youth exco member Abdul Ghani Harun.

The other two are reformasi activist Hishammuddin Rais and the director of the Free Anwar Campaign, Raja Petra Raja Kamaruddin.

Yesterday, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai said the seven were part of a group of about 20 reformasi activists who held meetings between Jan 6 and April 4, planning ways to influence the people to participate in street demonstrations.

One of the main aims of this group was to hold a massive demonstration known as Black 14 in the city on Saturday.

Asked whether the seven could have been detained using other laws apart from the ISA, Dr Mahathir said they could have, but normal laws required certain evidence, procedures and processes which, from the police point of view, were not effective in preventing something from happening.

"If it is something that has happened, then yes, but this is prevention...it means that the thing has not yet happened," he added.

To a question on human rights, he said the government placed importance on the rights of the majority and not a small number of people who had their own set agenda.

"We prioritise the rights of the majority...the rights of the majority to trade, live in a stable environment without pressure, without riots...these are human rights too. We cannot equate these with the rights of a small group which has specific interests which block the rights of others," he said.

He said those detained under the ISA could be held for 60 days and if it was found that they still posed a threat to the country's security, they

could be further detained for two years.

He said the ISA was still needed as a preventive law and that "if it (violence) has occurred and there is damage, maybe with people killed and so forth, it will no longer be useful then...people are injured, people are killed, people cannot do business...the action will be too late."

-- BERNAMA

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