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Mahathir-Terrorists

ERADICATE TERRORISM BY WINNING PEOPLE'S HEART, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 15 (Bernama) -- The approaches Malaysia adopted to eradicate terrorism included winning the heart and mind of the people so that they would not support the activities of the terrorists, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The country took this approach when dealing with the communist insurgents some years ago, said the Prime Minister.

"In Malaysia previously, when faced with (communist) terrorists, we not only fought against them but also launched a war to win the heart and mind of the people so that they would not support the terrorists. And when we knew of the reasons for the people's dissatisfaction, we overcame them by giving or doing something so that they would no longer feel alienated," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking in the "Khas Bersama Perdana Menteri" programme aired over RTM tonight in which he was interviewed on the effects of the Sept 11 attacks on the United States on Malaysia's economy, politics and security.

He said that among the measures that the country's first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, took at the time was to give citizenship to more than one million people who lived in Malaysia but did not have citizenship right.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia also acted to save those exposed to terrorism by giving them an opportunity to stay permanently in certain areas, do business and work.

"This way they no longer felt pressured or marginalised and so they did not support the terrorists. That is why we could defeat the terrorists, not only with military actions but through what is called winning the heart and mind of the people by psychology," he said.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia did not agree with the practice of declaring war on a country to eradicate terrorism and terrorists because this would not succeed in defeating the terrorists. Instead efforts should be made to find out why they resorted to terrorism and then try to eradicate the causes.

"Our stand is quite simple, that is we do not agree with acts of terror, do not agree with terrorists in whatever struggle.

"There may be people struggling to liberate their country but there are actions which are considered acts of terror, that is not fighting against the oppressors but causing deaths and injuries to innocent people, that is an act of terror," said Dr Mahathir.

He said that in countries like Malaysia where there were opportunities to change the government through the democratic system, there was no reason to resort to other means like terrorism.

The Prime Minister said that in dealing with new threat from extremist militant groups, it was important to have intelligence capability that could detect such groups at an early stage before they could grow.

"Nipping in the bud such threats would mean we could arrest people who threaten our security such as what we are doing under the ISA (Internal Security Act).

"We also need information. We know surely there are people who have information about such threats. Unfortunately such information was not passed on to the government. If not for the information-gathering by the police, we might not get this information," he said.

Dr Mahathir agreed with the view that Malaysia's modus operandi in dealing with security threats had not been effective of late as in the case of the KMM militant group whereby its activities were not detected until group members were caught during an attempted bank robbery.

"I agree our operandi were not that effective in detecting such activities. So it was with the Al Maunah case, when we saw a group of people carrying out training we thought this was something normal because in Malaysia we have many such groups.

"So we did not do anything until they carried out their activities, including killing people. This is very sad but now our apparatus has been enhanced," he said.

The authorities, he said, no longer regarded as insignificant the information that they obtained.

"They need to do research but when they do so, many people oppose this, saying this is suppressing the people's freedom. But the question is, are we concerned about the general security or the freedom of a few people," he said.

The Prime Minister said that one time Malaysia was severely criticised for using the ISA on the ground that it restricted freedom, but when the US created the executive order which allowed for killing on mere suspicion, "we have been vindicated".

"America or any country when they are secure they will consider actions to save people who are unsafe, like our situation before, as pressure, suppression, but when the same thing happens to them surely there will be realisation that they should also use the same methods," he said.

-- BERNAMA
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