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Mahathir-ISA

ISA EFFECTIVE TOOL TO COMBAT TERRORISM, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that it is now widely acknowledged that the Internal Security Act (ISA) is an effective tool to combat terrorism within the country.

He said if not for the ISA, it would have been difficult to bring Muslim radicals such as members of the al-Ma'unah and the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM) to book.

"To bring these terrorists through normal court procedures would have entailed adducing proper evidence which would have been difficult to obtain," he said in an exclusive interview published in the October issue of the Ad Rem, the official publication of the Selangor Bar Committee.

In the interview, Dr Mahathir said he had once toyed with the idea of repealing the ISA when the country was peaceful but was advised against it.

He said although the powers contained in the Act were wide and draconian in nature, the government had been cautious not to abuse it.

"Yes, the ISA offers wide powers. If we had misused these powers then a whole load of people would have been taken in," he said.

The Prime Minister also said that a large number of people under ISA detention were criminals associated with drugs and other serious crimes.

"There are people with plans for violent overthrow of the government because they think that the democratic system will not enable them to seize power," he said.

To a question, Dr Mahathir ruled out the possibility of banning PAS if it were to be found to have links with any terrorist organisation.

"We cannot easily ban a party like PAS because it will provoke violent reaction from its supporters. But we will have to persuade them to get away from making unreasonable demands to set up an Islamic state because we are already an Islamic state," he said.

Dr Mahathir also pointed out that the current military operations conducted by the United States in the wake of the Sept 11 attacks on the Pentagon in Washington and the World Trade Centre in New York would be grist to the mill for PAS.

"They will accuse the west for being of being anti-Islam in an effort to whip support for themselves. They have split the Malays and the Muslims here and they will do anything to gain an advantage," he said.

He said PAS would claim that there was oppression of Muslims all over the world.

"They will also say look at the government -- they are not doing anything, they are not Islamic enough," he said.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia supported the hunt for terrorists but not war.

Dr Mahathir stressed that the war against terrorism was two-pronged -- win the hearts of the people with simultaneous use of military force.

"So unless you can win the hearts of Muslims the world over, this war will not succeed, their media in the US does not give a true picture of what is happening," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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