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Misguided militants (HL)

Carolyn Hong

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - There is no cause for terrorist movements in Malaysia, and militant groups resort to violence because they cannot convince people to support them in an election, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the militant groups were misguided people who were championing imagined causes.

"What is the justification (for terrorism) in Malaysia when you can participate in politics and can be elected?

"If you can convince the majority of people in this country that your perception of a state is better than what we have now, the people will support you," he said.

He was speaking at a dialogue after delivering the keynote address at a Conference on Terrorism organised by the Institute for Strategic and International Studies.

The conference was attended by over 200 experts in their fields, Cabinet Ministers and opposition politicians including DAP national chairman Lim Kit Siang and Parti Rakyat Malaysia president Dr Syed Husin Ali.

Dr Mahathir felt that the Al-Ma'unah group and Kumpulan Militan Malaysia could be termed as terrorists as they had resorted to terror acts like killing people.

He added that the Al-Ma'unah had shot dead two people in the stand-off in Sauk and KMM had killed a Christian State Assemblyman.

"Action had to be taken against them. It's no good taking action after the crime. We have to act in anticipation, and not in the usual manner, because having to find proof of a crime which has not yet been committed is difficult."

He was responding to a question by PRM central youth wing committee member Latheefa Koya who had asked about the possible causes of terrorism in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said these groups felt that Malaysia was not enough of an Islamic state and therefore, they acted with violence.

"There is no cause whatsoever for acts of terror so we can assume that these people are naive or plain stupid, or they do not seem convinced that they can convince people (in an election)."

He said they had a fair chance of winning an election, pointing out that two States were now under opposition rule.

To another question by political scientist Dr Farish Noor on the intellectual culture in the Muslim world, Dr Mahathir said Islam did not have a central authority or priesthood.

Therefore, many were able to make use of the religion and played on the devotion of Muslims, in order to gain power.

"Unfortunately, most Muslims do not understand their religion except what these people tell them. There is no central authority ... the Pope may call for a crusade but in Islam, just about anybody in any kampung can call for jihad."

Dr Mahathir added that while the State had the authority to make pronouncements on Islam, some Muslims prefer to believe their religious teachers.

Elaborating at a Press conference, he said while there was no priesthood in Islam, some people are accepted by their followers as qualified to make fatwas.

Asked if it was better for the different religions to find common ground, he said there was the Interfaith Council but some people refused to take part because they insist that Muslims cannot have ties with non-Muslims.

On Parti Bersatu Sabah's application to rejoin Barisan Nasional, Dr Mahathir said it was still being looked at, and did not give a timeframe for a decision.

On a report in a Bangkok newspaper, The Nation, that seven generals had resigned from the Myanmar Government under pressure from Malaysia, he said there was no truth in the report.

"That's their own decision. It had nothing to do with us," he said, adding that Malaysia was only working with Myanmar on its democratisation process.

The report had said Dr Mahathir asked for the resignations at the Asean Summit in Brunei.

The Prime Minister said today that he did not touch on it at all at the summit.