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Mahathir-Terrorists

NO PROOF OF TERRORIST MONEY STASHED IN M'SIA, SAYS MAHATHIR

PUTRAJAYA, Sept 25 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said so far there is no proof yet of terrorists stashing money in Malaysia to finance their terror campaign.

The government would investigate any feedback that could substantiate such claim, he told a media conference at his office here today.

"Up to this point of time, of the names given to us, we have not been able to trace those of the alleged terrorists with money in our banking system," he said.

He was commenting on claims that Osama bin Laden, the United States's main suspect behind the Sept 11 terror attacks on New York and Washington, reportedly maintained bank accounts in Malaysia under a different name.

Dr Mahathir said the government did not find any evidence to suggest that Osama had kept his money in the country.

"If at all, terrorists did keep their money in the country, it does not mean we have become a depository of terror campaign funds.

"Perhaps they could have already closed their accounts but the information we have gathered so far show there is no terrorist money stashed in Malaysia," said Dr Mahathir.

Under normal circumstances, the government would not act if there was no information about terrorists "visiting" Malaysia.

"Foreigners coming here to flee from the law of another country will be extradited if there is extradition agreement.

"In fact even in the past we have helped to arrest drug traffickers taking refuge in Malaysia and extradited them to countries where they have allegedly broken the law," he said.

Foreign media reports this week named Malaysia as among nine Islamic countries demanded by the US to hand over suspected terrorists to Washington.

Dr Mahathir said so far Malaysia had already acted and arrested some home-grown militants while their other peers could not be traced and could have gone hiding abroad.

He said that while Malaysia's stand against terrorism was very clear and that it fully backed the hunt for terrorists, the question of handing over arrested Malaysian militants to a foreign power did not arise.

"There must be consideration whether there is justification to do so," he said.

Asked on the notion and the inclination to equate terrorism with Islam, Dr Mahathir said there were also terrorists of other religious beliefs.

"As such there is a need for a conference on the definition of terrorism and ways of dealing with it. A dual-pronged approach is needed to tackle terrorism," he said.

Dr Mahathir called for efforts to remove those strong feelings towards terrorism "so much so that people are willing to commit suicide."

"We have to identify these causes and overcome future terrorism. There is no guarantee that other people cannot become terrorists," he said.

Asked whether the government would request the United Nations to organise an international conference on terrorism, the prime minister said Malaysia would submit a formal proposal on the matter.

However, the timing for such a conference would not be suitable for the moment, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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