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PM exposes militant links (HL)

Patvinder Singh; Zubaidah Abu Bakar

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the eight individuals arrested on Thursday under the Internal Security Act have intentions of committing violence in the country. They include two Pas Youth chiefs.

The Prime Minister said such acts of violence included robbery and bombing.

He also disclosed links between certain Pas members and foreign militant groups such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, saying that some of the members of the opposition party were known to have been trained there.

Dr Mahathir was replying to reporters' questions on the arrests of the eight. They were arrested in a simultaneous nationwide operation for alleged involvement in an Islamic militant cell.

Yesterday, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai said those arrested had undergone military training with the Mujahidin in Afghanistan, or had fought in the jihad wars there.

Meanwhile, in Alor Star, Pas president Datuk Fadzil Mohd Noor said the party was disassociating itself from individuals working with or having links to the Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, a militant group.

Although Pas members had been allegedly linked to KMM, their activities should not be associated with the party, Fadzil said.

Fadzil said the party was unaware of its members' involvement in any militant group and if there was, they were acting individually.

"Do not involve Pas in this, it has nothing to do with the party," he said when asked to comment on the arrests.

Dr Mahathir acknowledged that while there were Pas members who wanted to abide by the country's laws and follow the democratic process, there were also extremists in the party who wanted to topple the Government through violence.

He said these extremists felt that the democratic process was slow or that it might not lead to success.

"Now they have returned and it was nothing to us that they had returned. But when we found they intended to act violently, including murdering, robbing banks, setting off bombs ... this we cannot allow in our country," he told a Press conference after opening the MCA's 48th general assembly today.

On the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam's) view that peaceful assemblies were possible if certain steps were taken by the organisers, Dr Mahathir said: "Suhakam seems to be setting up standards of its own. It is not interested in the nation's security.

"Suhakam is just one group of people but the interests of the majority of the people have to be taken into consideration."

Dr Mahathir said the Government felt there was more freedom in Malaysia than in many other countries, including some developed countries.

The arrests also triggered comments from Pas information chief Azizan Abdul Razak. He said activities of individuals should not be linked to Pas even if they were party members.

Azizan said one of those arrested, Zainon Ismail, 45, had been expelled by the party for breach of discipline recently.