

We'll get them

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Govt will continue to track down militants and extremists, says PM

■ By NICK LEONG

PUTRAJAYA: The Government will hunt down all militant activists and extremist elements in the country until they are no longer a threat to national security.

“Whether they are locals or foreigners . . . if they are in the country, we will take action against these terrorists,” Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said when commenting on the arrest of 13 members of a new cell of the so-called Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM) group.

The Prime Minister said the

Government would continue to track them down although they had not struck terror in Malaysia yet.

The Government was aware that an Indonesian militant group with links to the KMM was behind a spate of bombings in the republic, he told reporters after attending a Foreign Ministry Hari **raya** open house at Wisma Putra, here, yesterday.

The possibility of the KMM mounting similar bomb attacks in Malaysia could not be discounted and as such, must be checked, Dr Mahathir said.

Inspector-General of Police Tan

Sri **Norian Mai** announced on Friday the arrests of the 13 militants during a nationwide operation between Dec 9 and Thursday. He said one of the **KMM** members was believed to have links with the al-Qaeda terrorist group.

Asked if the latest arrests confirmed claims by the foreign media that Malaysia was a haven for terrorists, Dr Mahathir said it showed that the Government was firm in dealing with terrorists.

“If we promised to take action against terrorists, regardless of whether they are locals or foreign-

ers, we will take action,” he said.

However, he added, the police needed reasonable proof before it could take action.

“We want to find out who they actually are. Sometimes they come as tourists.

“Are we going to ask them if they are terrorists? Will they then say ‘Yes, we are indeed terrorists.’?”

“When they come, we assume they are tourists unless we have proof or information that they are terrorists,” he said.

Explaining how difficult it was to identify a terrorist, Dr Mahathir

said among the communist guerrillas faced by the country during the 60s and 70s were ordinary people.

“They were ordinary businessmen and hawkers by day. But at night, they became terrorists,” he said.

Commenting on a report by **Jane Intelligence Review** that Malaysia could have helped to avert the Sept 11 attacks on New York and Washington because some of the suspected terrorists were seen here in January 2000, Dr Mahathir said the magazine was trying to find

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faults with others.

"They (the terrorists) did not tell us (about their plans). If Boeing had not built the plane, it (the hijackings) would not have happened also," he said.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the arrest of more KMM members showed the effectiveness of the Government in dealing with terrorism.

"The way we have acted to prevent the security situation from getting out of control, our intelligence and pre-emptive actions have given a lot of confidence to the people."

Asked if the Foreign Ministry planned to review visa requirements for visitors from certain regions, Syed Hamid said the Government wanted to encourage tourism.

"So long as we have no

record of them doing anything wrong, there is no reason to (have stricter entry requirements). If we have information that they are trouble-makers, we will not allow them into the country," he added.

At another Hari Raya open house, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Sam-sudin Osman said heads of government departments must take action against staff suspected of being involved in militant activities.

In Jempol, Negri Sembilan, Mentri Besar Tan Sri Mohamed Isa Abdul Samad said the arrest of the 13 KMM members showed that the Government was serious in rooting out militancy in the country.

"This will bring confidence to the people," he said at a Hari Raya gathering.