We'll act against terrorists, says PM

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SHAH ALAM, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reiterated today that the Government would not hesitate to take action against suspected terrorist elements in the country.

Dr Mahathir said that if such "elements" were positively identified, then they should be arrested as militants could not be allowed to undermine democracy.

"If we can identify them we have to arrest them because we cannot allow these people to freely make use of democracy to undermine democracy," Dr Mahathir said responding to questions if there were any impending arrests of terror suspects.

The Prime Minister was speaking at a Press conference after delivering his keynote address at the "Understanding Malaysia as an Islamic State" seminar here.

Yesterday, the Singapore Government announced the detention of another 21 suspected terrorists under the republic's Internal Security Act.

Apart from allegations of having undergone military training at al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, Singapore's Home Ministry stated that 19 of the 21 "are or have been" members of the Islamic group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

Two others were said to be linked to the Philippines-based Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Last December, 13 JI members were arrested for allegedly plotting to blow up American and other Western targets in the city-state.

All 34 are held under ISA, which permits detention without trial.

On another matter, Dr Mahathir said Iraq's readiness to allow the unconditional return of United Nations weapons inspectors to the country should be reciprocated with the lifting of sanctions on Iraq.

"I think we should already take action to lift the sanctions because as I have repeatedly said, sanctions are not hurting Saddam Hussein but a lot of poor people, the old, little children and pregnant mothers. These are the people who are paying the price.

"If you say that Saddam is a very cruel man and that he doesn't care about his people, you are not doing anything good for his people (either) but (are) punishing them for something which they are not responsible," Dr Mahathir said when asked for his comments on Iraq's decision to allow the return of the weapons inspectors.