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S'pore-Author

AUTHOR SAYS MALAYSIA HAS NO GROUNDS TO BAN HIS BOOK

SINGAPORE, Oct 21 (Bernama)--Dr Rohan Gunaratna, author of "Inside Al-Qaeda -- Global Network of Terror" who allegedly linked the Barisan Nasional (BN) to the Al-Qaeda network, says Malaysia has no grounds to ban his book.

"No where in my book have I linked Al-Qaeda to the Barisan Nasional. I believe that the Malaysian politicians who called for a ban of my book have therefore not read Inside Al-Qaeda-Global Network of Terror.

"As such I do not think that Malaysia will ever ban my book. There is absolutely no grounds whatsoever for banning my book," he told Bernama in an interview here today.

Malaysian politicians, angered by his alleged linking of the BN to the AL-Qaeda network, have demanded that his book be banned and that he be questioned by the authorities in Malaysia.

Interest in Dr Gunaratna's book in Malaysia was sparked by a United Nations (UN) Security Council document which contains a chart of alleged Al-Qaeda activities in Southeast Asia, said to have been extracted from his book.

According to newsreports, the chart showed Al-Qaeda links to, among others, Kumpulan Mujahiddeen Malaysia (KMM), Jemaah Islamiah (JI), Abu Sayyaf and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The chart, the newsreports said, also implied that MILF maintained ideological and political links with BN and other parties and organisations.

Dr Gunaratna explained that the only groups in Malaysia that were linked to the Al-Qaeda were the KMM and the JI. There were no other political activities or extremist groups that were linked to the Al-Qaeda, he added.

"I can't understand why all the fires are coming at me. They (Malaysians) are first shooting at someone and they are saying they have shot the right man.

In fact, he said he had not even seen a copy of the UN report.

"I will give a million dollars or a million pounds if anyone can find the links in my book," said Dr Gunaratna.

He also showed proof that no where was there a chart in his book which showed the BN's links to Al-Qaeda. According to newsreports, the chart from the UN document was extracted from his book.

"There's no chart in my book. The Malaysian press has created this confusion that there is a chart in my book."

Then it is the UN's chart?

"Absolutely", said Dr Gunaratna, who is a Visiting Senior Fellow of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies at the Nanyang Technology University here.

Dr Gunaratna also showed page 197 of his book, which cited the MILF (and not the Al-Qaeda) as having links with several individual members of political parties in Malaysia.

Quoting a paragraph in the page: Dr Gunaratna writes: "MILF nurtures and maintains links with several individual members of political parties in Malaysia. With the exception of military co-operation with JI and KMM, MILF's links are ideological and political, e.g. with the Movement of the Islamic Unity (APU); Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM); Islamic Front of Malaysia (IFM); Front Malaysian Islamic Council (FMIC); Kongress

Indian Muslim Malaysia (KIMM): Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (MIYM), Barisan Nasional (BN); and PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia)."

On whether he should apologise to the Malaysian government, Dr Gunaratna said he saw no reason why he should as he had not done anything wrong, repeating his earlier statements to the press that he had not linked the BN to the Al-Qaeda network.

"I understand from my Malay friends that it is a strong Malay cultural practice in Malaysia to apologise to people when a mistake is made.

"Therefore, I only hope that those politicians who have accused me, unknowingly based on the UN report without seeing my book, will now at least acknowledge, if not apologise for accusing me of linking Al-Qaeda to Barisan Nasional."

Asked whether he wished to seek clarification from the UN on the issue, he said there was no reason to. "For the Malaysians, it is a matter with the UN. For me, it is a matter with the Malaysians."

Dr Gunaratna also showed a draft copy of his letter to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi dated today which he would send it through the Malaysian High Commission here, together with a copy of his book.

In his letter to Abdullah, Dr Gunaratna wrote:

"I refer to the remarks you have made to the press concerning the UN report which alleged that BN has links with Al-Qaeda. This report is said to have cited my book on these links.

Nowhere in my book have I linked Al-Qaeda to the Barisan Nasional. I cannot at this point of time comment on the UN report as I have not seen a copy of it. I attach a copy of my book, Inside Al-Qaeda as a gift to you.

On page 197, I wrote that "MILF nurtures and maintains links with several individuals and political parties in Malaysia," and this includes individuals from the BN. This is perfectly natural as the BN has also been involved in helping the Philippine Government and the Moros to arrive at a lasting peace settlement. Nowhere did I say, or infer, that the BN is in any way connected to Al-Qaeda.

In fact, I have only great praise for the efforts of the Government of Malaysia, especially the work of Dr Mahathir Bin Mohamad, in its frontline role in fighting terrorism. I hope this clarifies the issue. I look forward to your response," said Dr Gunaratna in the letter.

He also urged those who have called for his arrest to attend his talk on the terrorism threat in South East Asia organised by Malaysia's Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) in Kuala Lumpur next month.

Dr Gunaratna who has written six books on armed conflicts, has been called to address the United Nations, the US Congress, and had served as principal investigator of the UN Terrorism Prevention Branch.

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