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`Gunaratna's book doesn't link BN to al-Qaeda'

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Sri Lankan writer Dr Rohan Gunaratna need not apologise to Malaysia as his book did not indicate any link between Barisan Nasional and the al-Qaeda terrorist network.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he had read the book and found that Gunaratna did not say that the BN was linked to al-Qaeda, but to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

"Why should he (Gunaratna) apologise. He did not say that ...it was the United Nations' report which linked the BN to al-Qaeda.

"The book only said that the BN has some contact with the MILF," he said after closing a two-day seminar on the gold dinar, here today.

The Prime Minister was asked whether Malaysia would ask Gunaratna to apologise for his remark in his book Inside al-Qaeda - Global Network of Terror, which said that the BN was linked to al-Qaeda as quoted in a United Nations monitoring group report recently.

Dr Mahathir said the BN Government did have contact with the MILF because Malaysia was helping the Philippine Government to resolve its problems in the south.

"In fact, they (the MILF) came to Kuala Lumpur and signed an agreement with the Philippine Government witnessed by representatives of Malaysia last year."

On whether Malaysia should apologise to Gunaratna for accusing the writer of tarnishing the country's image, Dr Mahathir said: "We do not apologise to such people. He must be careful when he writes."

Dr Mahathir also said the UN had yet to respond to Malaysia's protest over the report.

Earlier reports said the Cabinet would recommend that the United Nations Security Council dismiss allegations contained in the report written by the Sri Lankan analyst.

Malaysians, angered by reports linking the BN to the al-Qaeda network, have demanded that the book be banned and Gunaratna be questioned by the authorities in Malaysia.

Interest in Gunaratna's book in Malaysia was sparked by a United Nations Security Council's document which contained a chart of alleged al-Qaeda activities in Southeast Asia.

According to news reports, the chart showed al-Qaeda's links to, among others, Kumpulan Militan Malaysia, Jemaah Islamiah, Abu Sayyaf and the MILF.

The chart also implied that the MILF maintained ideological and political links with the BN as well as other parties and organisations.