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Clear Malaysia's and BN's name, says PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The United Nations must take necessary steps to clear Malaysia's and Barisan Nasional's name which have been mistakenly linked to the al-Qaeda terror network, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said although the UN had revoked the allegations, which were in the UN's monitoring groups' report for the Security Council, the allegations still remained in print in the report.

"We want the report to be cleared of any mention that the BN has links with the al-Qaeda," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, was speaking at a Press conference after chairing the party's supreme council meeting at Menara Dato' Onn here.

In October, a United Nations' monitoring groups report for the Security Council linked BN to the al-Qaeda terrorist network.

The report had used a book called Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror written by analyst Rohan Gunaratna.

In the chart, it depicts the BN, Pas and the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia or Abim as local groups having ideological and political links to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines which in turn was linked directly to the al-Qaeda.

On another matter, Dr Mahathir said Umno rejected the idea of pre-emptive strikes as proposed by Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

"We reject the idea and view the proposal very seriously because if the UN agrees with the proposal to amend the international law to accommodate this proposal, then nations will lose their independence and freedom.

"This will provide ample room for superpower nations to violate the freedom of others at ease," Dr Mahathir said, adding that the question of a protest note to the UN pertaining this matter would be discussed by the Government soon.

Howard recently drew widespread criticism from countries in the region when he announced Australia's intention to embark on pre-emptive attacks against terrorists in neighbouring countries if they planned attacks on Australia.

Among others, Howard had said the UN charter should be amended to allow pre-emptive strikes against terrorists in other countries.

Dr Mahathir said the meeting today also took note of the election of the new South Korean president and expressed hope that the new administration would improve its ties with North Korea and reduce the tension in the Korean Peninsula.

On human rights and the Internal Security Act, Dr Mahathir said the Government took into consideration the human rights of the people in implementing the ISA, and not just those of the detainees.

He said if a person violated the human rights of another person, then the aggressor would lose his basic rights.

"We must remember that the majority of the people have their human rights too. If someone commits an act that violates the human rights of the majority, then he has done something that shows he has no respect for human rights.

"And if he has no respect for human rights, there is no need for us to respect his human rights," he said.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on Human Rights Commission of Malaysia

(Suhakam) Chairman Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman's statement today which said Suhakam would submit two reports on the ISA to the Home Ministry. (See report on page 8).

Dr Mahathir also drew the media's attention to the detention of 400 Muslim men in the United States after they voluntarily presented themselves at Immigration offices to register under new anti-terrorism rules.

"I read today ... of Muslim men detained. When asked to register, they went to register and they were detained. I don't know what kind of law (they are enforcing)," he added.

At the end of the Press conference reporters wished Dr Mahathir and sang him a song in conjunction with his 77th birthday. He was visibly moved, and when asked what was his wish, Dr Mahathir said: "My wish is all for this nation. I hope we will continue to prosper and I think I won't be leaving with a heavy heart, knowing that I am handing over my duties to an able Prime Minister," while pointing to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who was standing next to him.