

11 JAN 2002  
Mahathir-PAS  
DENYING TRUTH IS NORMAL FOR PAS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 11 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said denying truth or dismissing events as sheer play-acting or conspiracy have always a routine practice by PAS and the way it looked at the 2000 Sauk hostage-taking incident was no exception.

"As for PAS denying the truth is a normal thing to do. PAS has never acknowledged truth to the extent that it is willing to lie," Dr Mahathir told reporters after launching the Youth Chamber of the Malaysian Malay Chamber of Commerce here today.

He was approached for comment on PAS vice president Datuk Mustafa Ali's reported statement today, which added a new twist to the issue, that the party now did not view the murder of two soldiers in the Sauk incident as orchestrated.

Mustafa reportedly said PAS only regarded the arms heists from two military camps in upper Perak on the same day prior to the hostage-taking incident as play-acting.

Dr Mahathir said: "Now I would like very much to know who staged the arms heists then. If the same people did it, how can they say that it was mere play-acting whereas the same firearms were used to murder people.

"I cannot quite understand the way PAS distort things. The arms heists were the prelude to the murder of a policeman and a soldier (in the Sauk incident)."

The Kuala Lumpur High Court on Dec 27 found 19 members of the Al-Ma'unah group involved in the Sauk incident guilty of waging war against the King and sentenced their leader and two henchmen to death. Sixteen others were jailed for their natural life.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to elaborate on his disclosure in an interview with the Japanese magazine "Chuokoron" that 50 Malaysians were identified as having links with the Al-Qaeda terrorist network led by Osama bin Laden whom the United States suspected as the mastermind behind last year's Sept 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

He said: "Following the (botched) armed robbery at the (Southern) bank, police questioned one of the arrested robbers. From this source we obtained information that the murder of an assemblyman (Dr Joe Fernandez of Lunas) and the attempted arms heist at the Guar Chempedak police station were committed by members of the group.

"Following that we were able to identify those in the group and detain them under the ISA (Internal Security Act). I have no idea how many of them (are detained under the ISA) now."

Asked whether they have links to militants in the group called Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM), Dr Mahathir said: "Yes, they belong to one group but of different cells. They use the cell system. One cell has no knowledge of the other."

When asked whether those involved would be formally charged, the prime minister said in the case of a definite crime like the murder of the state assemblyman, "if we can find enough proof, we will try them".

On the opposition harping on the death of Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim's son as an issue in this month's Indera Kayangan by-election, Dr Mahathir said: "Let us not use such an issue without due regard to the grief of a father who has lost a child. It's very crude."

Shahidan's youngest child Ameer Mohamed Fawwaz, three, who shared the same birthday with him, fell to his death from a city condominium here on

Dec 10.

On the reluctance of students, especially the Malays, to repay government study loans, Dr Mahathir said such behaviour would tarnish the image of the community.

"If you have an attitude like that, then of course you will never succeed. If you do not pay back, next time you want to go and borrow, you won't get (any loan). And not only that, because you misbehave by not paying back, the whole community suffers," he said.

Dr Mahathir said because of the behaviour of such Malays, the banks might lose faith resulting in their reluctance to give out loans.

"Now I find when Malays go to the bank to borrow money, the tendency is to be wary of their presence. (It is) because they have lost faith due to the behaviour of these people (loan defaulters). You must think not only of yourself but also your community," he added.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on newspaper reports that borrowers had only repaid RM100 million of the RM2 billion lent by the Public Service Department to more than 100,000 students since 1987.

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