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Downer-Malaysia
DOWNER DEFENDS RAIDS ON MUSLIM HOUSES

By: Neville d'Cruz

MELBOURNE, Nov 6 (Bernama) -- Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer today defended raids on Muslim homes by security agencies and dismissed Malaysia's claim that his country is unsafe for Muslims.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said Australia was particularly unsafe for Muslims because they were likely to have their homes raided by security agencies.

He had also criticised Australia and the United States' travel warnings for South-East Asian nations in the wake of the Bali bombings.

Dr Mahathir said in Cambodia, where he attended the 8th Asean Summit meeting, yesterday that Australia and the United States were also exposed to terrorism.

Downer said Malaysian criticism of Australia was nothing new.

"I'm not really going to respond to that except to say this: as you know these raids were conducted as a result of Jemaah Islamiah being proscribed and it was proscribed because it was listed as a terrorist organisation by the United Nations," he told the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) Radio.

"And I very much appreciate the fact that Malaysia co-sponsored the listing of Jema'ah Islamiah in the UN as a terrorist organisation, and I acknowledge the fact that the Malaysian Government has taken tough action against Jema'ah Islamiah members and in many cases arrested and detained members of Jema'ah Islamiah under Malaysia's Internal Security Act."

"So all Australia is doing here is making sure that our 19.5 million people are as safe as they can possibly can be. And where people are part of a UN listed and Australian proscribed terrorist organisation, or if they've got associations with those organisations I think it's appropriate that we should investigate them," he said.

Downer said that Australia had to put the security of Australians at the top of the list.

"I mean we can't be going around saying we're going to overlook information we have about possible terrorist attacks, including against westerners and therefore Australians, in the interest of making sure that nobody throughout South-East Asia is upset about our travel warnings," he said.

"We have to put the security of our people first. They expect us to do so. And imagine the consequences if we were negligent in our duty and just decided not to tell people about the dangers," said Downer.

-- BERNAMA

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