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Don't make us look so bad, PM tells local dailies

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed disappointment with local newspapers for giving a wrong impression on the arrest of eight university students who were caught in the Barisan Nasional's Indera Kayangan by-election operations centre for trespassing yesterday.

"There is slight variation between the headlines and the actual reason why they were apprehended, which is unfortunately buried at the bottom of the stories that followed.

"This gives the impression that we purposely arrested the students and that we did so without a valid reason.

"I appeal to the Press not to make us look so bad," he said, noting that the culprits should know from the outset that their action was a criminal offence.

Dr Mahathir said this after delivering a keynote address at the Third Public Service Premier Function at the National Institute of Public Administration (Intan) at Bukit Kiara here.

The students and a housewife who were held overnight by police for questioning, also tried to sabotage the BN campaign by destroying the party's posters.

They were released on police bail at 8.45pm yesterday.

Dr Mahathir also said a white paper on investigations relating to the Al-Ma'unah group would be issued soon.

"We are going to proceed with it now as the trial is already over.

"The problem before was that we might be held in contempt of court."

Dr Mahathir also expressed doubt if Pas would ever be convinced that the arms heist at two military camps in Sauk, Perak by members of the group was not a sandiwara (play).

On Dec 27, all 19 Al-Ma'unah members, including group leader Mohd Amin Mohd Razali, were found guilty by judge Datuk Zulkefli Ahmad Makinudin and were sentenced the following day.

Three of them - Mohd Amin, Zahit Muslim, and Jamaludin Darus - were sentenced to death while the others were jailed for life.

On a report in Singapore's Berita Harian which claimed that the Sept 11 terrorists attacks on the US could have been prevented had Malaysia arrested the two prime suspects when they toured Malaysia in January last year, Dr Mahathir said:

"They had (also) been in the US for one month. Why didn't the US detain them?

"They were also in Switzerland, and the Swiss authorities, too, did not detain them".

A report in the daily said the two men - Khalid Al-Midhar and Nawaf Al-Azmi - were in Malaysia from Aug 5 to Aug 8, 2000.

The paper had quoted Jane's Intelligence Review, a defence and intelligence magazine.

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