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BN, Opposition leaders condemn report

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Protests over the United Nations monitoring group's report which linked Barisan Nasional to the al-Qaeda terrorists network were overflowing from both government and opposition leaders.

All expressed their disgust over the report which they described as baseless, oppressive, malicious and intended to undermine the credibility of the Malaysian Government.

They said the group should apologise to Malaysians and the Malaysian Government for publishing the report.

In Marang, Pas acting president and Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang wants everyone to share responsibility in defending the pride and credibility of the country from being linked with the al-Qaeda terrorist network or other militant groups.

He said today that the report affected all the people.

"Although I have contrasting views with BN on national matters, as a Malaysian I am affected by the report," he told reporters at his residence.

The allegation of such links was published in a chart taken from Rohan Gunaratna's book, Inside al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror.

It depicts the BN, Pas and Abim as being among the local groups bearing "ideological and political links" to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, which in turn is linked directly to al-Qaeda.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik dismissed the report as "absolute nonsense".

Dr Ling, head of the ruling coalition's second-largest party said here today that Malaysia's stance against terrorism was well-known, as it had led in international forums condemning such acts.

"We are catching the KMM (Kumpulan Militan Malaysia) and Al-Maunah people. It is absolutely unthinkable that BN is involved in terrorism," he said after chairing the party's central committee meeting at Wisma MCA.

Dr Ling, who is also Transport Minister, said the recent bombings in Bali, Indonesia and Zamboanga, Philippines, showed that detentions under the Internal Security Act were necessary to contain terrorism.

In Kota Baru, Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat said the report was unacceptable.

He said the UN was controlled by US and other major powers like Britain, Russia, China and France which were all former colonialists.

"How can we accept totally what they say," he told reporters after his weekly religious talk at the Pas headquarters today.

Nik Aziz, who is Pas spiritual adviser, also said it was unfair to link terrorism with religions. He said all religions want their followers to be safe in this world and the hereafter.

In Alor Star, Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib questioned the credibility and the motive of Gunaratna, saying that he was irresponsible.

He said Gunaratna's claim was taken seriously by the UN's monitoring group because he is a Sri Lankan.

"Coming from a Third World nation, he is perceived to be a credible source," he said.

Muhammad described the report as an evil attempt to smear the name of Umno and Barisan Nasional.

He said the party might also take a more serious form of action to

prevent the writer from continuing to spread such lies. He, however, did not elaborate on the type of action.

Earlier, Muhammad opened a four-day international conference and exhibition to honour renowned writer and head of the Federation of Malaysian Writers Association of Malaysia (Gapena) Prof Emeritus Tan Sri Ismail Hussain.

Malaysian Youth Council secretary-general Norizan Sharif said the report could be a planned effort to provoke Malaysians.

"We should be wary of such provocation and not fall into the trap where our action would justify the report's claims," Norizan said in a statement.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said he did not expect the report to affect tourism and dismissed it "stupid and ridiculous".

In Seremban, Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar and State BN chairman Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad said the report was a hidden agenda by the group to tarnish the image of the Malaysian Government.

"Malaysia is an Islamic country, respected by the whole world. The views of our leaders are heard and recognised internationally and this makes some quarters, including the group, not happy," he told reporters after the opening of the third Budget session of the State Legislative Assembly by Yang di-Pertuan Negri Sembilan, Tuanku Ja'afar, today.

DAP life adviser Dr Chen Man Hin said the monitoring group should be able to substantiate its claims when it accused the BN of having links with the al-Qaeda terrorist network. Otherwise, it should apologise to all Malaysians.

Dr Chen said BN's policies were good and that it had been consistent in its efforts to fight terrorism.

He added that the BN should take the lead to hold a conference and invite all opposition parties, non-governmental organisations and others so that they could make clear their stance on terrorism.

"Once we have reached a consensus, we will be able to tell the whole world that we are anti-terrorists."

Pas Youth head Mahfuz Omar said that the allegation was malicious and only aimed at discrediting Islamic movements in the country.

"The BN Government should not fall prey to this trick and start a witch hunt against leaders of the Opposition, especially Pas and detain them under the Internal Security Act," he said when contacted.

Meanwhile, the Opposition Front has called on the United Nations to be more responsible in making allegations against Malaysia, linking it to the al-Qaeda terrorist network.

Its secretariat chairman AbdRahman Othman said that the allegations were very serious and there have not been any such remarks made previously against any ruling party in South East Asia.

Parti Keadilan Nasional president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail said the Government, led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, should explain why BN was implicated in the UN report.

Dr Wan Azizah added that the police should also explain why they were unable to detect BN's alleged involvement with the al-Qaeda.