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Terror warning: PM raps US (HL)

Ramlan Said; Joniston Bangkuai
PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight rapped the
United States for issuing a warning about possible terror strikes in
Malaysia, saying it was obvious that the co-operation extended by Malaysia
in combating terrorism had been disregarded.
   Expressing his disappointment, the Prime Minister said the US should not
be too carefree in passing judgment about other countries as it was also
exposed to danger from terrorism.
   "We have been co-operating so much with them, (yet) this is what we get.
   "They should tell us (of the threats) so that we can take action.
   "If what they claim does not happen, what will they say?
   "Are they prepared to take a bet on this?" he asked, adding that such
baseless claims could harm Malaysia's economy.
   Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, was speaking after breaking
fast with Finance Ministry staff at the ministry.
   He said if other countries could be labelled as unsafe, the US was no
different.
   "The most dangerous place is the US. A lone gunman is enough to create
havoc in Washington," he said, in reference to the sniper who had
terrorised the Washington area for weeks.
   Asked if the warning could be termed as economic sabotage, Dr Mahathir
replied: "I don't know but the fact is that this is happening."
   To a suggestion that the warning was intended for Americans, the Prime
Minister retorted: "What for? They should tell us but as far as I know,
they have not done so."
   The US yesterday warned that attacks, similar to the bombings which
killed over 180 people in Bali last month, could take place in other
Southeast Asian nations, including Malaysia.
   The State Department reiterated concerns about "possible heightened
risks to American citizens and American interests" in Malaysia.
   It also expressed concern about the possibility of attacks by the
Philippine-based Abu Sayyaf Muslim group in Sabah, and urged US citizens
visiting the islands or coastal regions of eastern Sabah to exercise
"extreme caution."
   The State Department said it was worried that the Jemaah Islamiah (JI)
could target Westerners outside Indonesia.
   In a statement issued through Bernama, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri
Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the US warning was nothing new.
   "Several Western governments have issued similar travel advisories since
the Sept 11 attacks last year," he said.
   Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said there have, in fact, been
reports of alleged terrorists and al-Qaeda members being arrested all over
the world, including Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia.
   He said Malaysia had taken preventive action and arrested those linked
to Kumpulan Militan Malaysia and JI.
   "But as Dr Mahathir has pointed out, it is unsafe to visit some of these
countries that are issuing such advisories about Southeast Asia.
   "We note that there have been racist attacks and violence against non-
whites in many of these countries. In comparison, Malaysia has been a very
safe country," Abdullah said.
   He said Malaysia had been in the forefront fighting terrorism and would
continue to give full support in the war on terror.

"But we want to emphasise that no country in the world is safe from attacks by demented terrorists, whether they are terrorists who justify their action on ideological, religious or ethnic grounds," he said.

Abdullah said as far as the Malaysian Government was concerned, "we are determined to continue taking all necessary security measures to ensure that our country remains safe and secure."

Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai said Bukit Aman will get in touch with the US State Department, through its embassy here, to obtain detailed information on the claims of bombing threats in Sabah.

He said police had not received any information of a potential attack.

"We don't know whether the report is correct, and we will contact their ambassador," he said after visiting the Puchong police station today.

He said he read the report from the news agencies, and not from the State Department or any US representative here.

Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat dismissed the US' concern about security in Sabah, saying that the State was peaceful.

Chong said the State continued to receive visitors from all over the world.