

28 JAN 2002

Mahathir-Attacks

US, NOT MALAYSIA, THE LAUNCH PAD FOR SEPT 11 ATTACKS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today denied allegations that Malaysia was the launch pad for the Sept 11 attacks on the United States, saying that the actual launch pad was the US itself.

"These people were training in the US all the time and then they planned in America (on) how to hijack American planes, at what time, which plane, which building. All that was done in America, not done in Malaysia," he said.

Speaking to reporters after launching the Finance Ministry's Quality Day and "Day With Clients" programme at the ministry here, Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said: "As far as we know, there is no Malaysian connection in the attacks on the US.

"But we do know that there were Malaysians who have been trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan, came back with the intention to destabilise this country, to create racial tension, religious tension, things like that, and they have the intention to form a government through terrorist acts."

He was asked to comment on a foreign news report alleging that Malaysia was a primary operational launch pad for the Sept 11 attacks on the US.

The report, in the Newsweek's latest edition, said that US intelligence sources believed a former Malaysian army captain, Yazid Sufaat, who was a member of the Islamic extremist group Jemaah Islamiah, helped develop a support network for chief terror suspect Osama bin Laden in Malaysia and throughout Southeast Asia.

The report also alleged that Kuala Lumpur was the perfect place for Arabs to lie low and the city attracted many Arab tourists.

The report also claimed that Malaysian law allowed Muslims to enter and exit the country without visas.

It said that in January 2000, Sufaat held a meeting in his Kuala Lumpur condominium with top associates of Osama in accordance with instruction given to him by an Indonesian cleric with ties to al-Qaeda, Osama's terror network.

Dr Mahathir said the terrorist suspects were travelling all over the world including Switzerland.

"Well, they should have been arrested in Switzerland but they were not arrested in Switzerland.

"They came here as tourists. If we were to arrest every Arab tourist here, then nobody will ever come to Malaysia," he said.

The Prime Minister doubted that Yazid was involved in the planning of the Sept 11 attacks and asked those who have information to provide evidence.

"Let's see the evidence. It is very easy to say that he had done it but did he do it in Malaysia, did he plan everything. I doubt it...it's too sophisticated an operation," he said.

On claims that Yazid was taking instructions from an Indonesian cleric with ties to the Al-Qaeda, Dr Mahathir said the Malaysian authorities have no knowledge of it then.

"If they had prior knowledge, if they informed us then, we would have taken action, but we knew nothing.

"When we found out who they were, what they were planning, we have taken action, arrested nearly all of them," he said with reference to the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM) members.

Asked whether Malaysia was taking any action on the incorrect news report, the Prime Minister said Malaysia would see what it could do.

"I don't know, this so-called freedom of the press. I am so sorry I am talking to the press now but sometimes freedom of the press is abused by these people for their own agenda.

"We know they don't like Malaysia for some reason or other and no matter what we do, they are going to say bad things about us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia, among other things, has done very well in the management of the economy, in management of relations between different races in the country and has grown very rapidly but none of these achievements were ever mentioned by them.

"At any time they mentioned about Malaysia, they say (it's) where the press is under government control and yet the Asian Wall Street Journal and the Herald Tribune (which) are printed in Malaysia, say nasty things about Malaysia and we have never stopped this.

"These newspapers have got no moral sense at all and are bent on telling lies," he said

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak described the allegations as "stretching it a bit too far" and that as far as the government was concerned, Malaysia was not a launch pad for the attacks on US soil.

"I think it is almost a fantasy to say that Malaysia was the launch pad for the Sept 11 attacks," he told reporters after taking part in a charity golf competition (Golf Sumbangsih 2002) to raise money for the Tabung Amanah Perwira dan Pertahanan Negara in Seri Kembangan.

He said the total failure of the US intelligence community led to those responsible being unable to detect potential terrorist threats.

"In fact, the whole operational planning was done in the US itself, the training of the pilots, the details of the operation were done in the US. So how can they say Malaysia was the launch pad. I don't understand," he said.

Najib said Malaysia received many Arab visitors but this did not mean that they were terrorists.

"We cannot arrest them unless (it is) proven they are terrorists," he said.

Commenting on the matter, Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said that the movement strongly denounced the action of certain foreign correspondents and media to tarnish the image of Malaysia.

He said that the Malaysian missions and Malaysians abroad should be sensitive and monitor media reports in their respective locality.

"An appropriate explanation must be provided immediately to prevent misconception of the world regarding Malaysia as a result of inaccurate and unethical reports by the Western media," he said.

The Umno Youth also called on US Ambassador Marie Huhtala to explain to the Malaysian government how a conclusion that the country was a launch pad for the terrorist operations was reached.

-- BERNAMA
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