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Book gives insight into Al-Maunah

By Kasmiah Mustapha

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - It happened four years ago but the story of the Al-Maunah gang continues to enthrall Malaysians.

Some people still shake their heads in disbelief at the very thought of this motley group pulling off an arms heist at a military camp and then having the audacity to ask the then Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, to make way for an Islamic administration.

Some people still believe that the drama, which resulted in the death of a Special Branch officer and a commando, was stage-managed by a government wanting to show the dangers of Islamic extremism.

A new book by Zabidi Mohamed, lawyer for three of the gang members, is likely to answer some of the nagging questions over the incident in Bukit Jenalek, Perak.

He culled most of the information in the book from interviews with his clients - Zahit Muslim, Jamaludin Darus and Kamarudin Mustafa.

The trio scoff at suggestions that the incident was stage-managed, saying that group leader Mohd Amin Razali had a plan of action.

They also said that the gravity of their action only hit them when they were holed up in the jungle, surrounded by crack troops.

A few of the Al-Maunah group wanted to surrender early.

But group leader Mohd Amin Razali warned them that if they deserted, he would sanction their killing.

Fearful of getting a bullet in their back, they stayed put, wishing that they had not answered an advertisement by Mohd Amin in Harakah, the Pas newsletter, asking for volunteers to join a silat group.

From the outset, a few members had some reservations about Mohd Amin.

They noted that although he wore the garb of a religious man, spouted verses from the Quran and admonished followers for smoking, he was a chain-smoker.

He also was not above making a profit at the expense of his followers, Zabidi wrote. For instance, he used to buy parangs from the Central Market and sell them to his followers at a profit.

Among other interesting nuggets of information in the book, titled Maunah, the Naked Truth:

* The failed attempt by Al-Maunah members armed with a rocket-launcher to blow up the Carlsberg factory in Shah Alam, the Guinness Stout refinery in Sungai Way and a Hindu temple in Batu Caves.

* The belief of some Al-Maunah members that the only way to set up an Islamic state was through force. They had given up on elections and were frustrated that the authorities were not giving ulama a bigger say in government and not allowing Pas to hold ceramah.

Mohd Amin, Zahit and Jamaludin were sentenced to death, while Kamarudin and others were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Zabidi, a former legal adviser to Al-Arqam, said that in his experience, blind loyalty to the leader and fanaticism were among the reasons why people joined cult groups.

Throw in the promise of a better afterlife and the leader had "mystical powers", and the group would be assured of a better enrolment, said Zabidi.

"The followers would believe that the leader is pure. They would idolise him. Taksub with the leader can make them break the law as the members of Al-Maunah did," he said in an interview recently.

Zabidi has since left legal practice and is now a full-time writer. He said leaders of both Al-Arqam and Al-Maunah were able to influence people who were far more educated than they were because followers believed in their abilities and promises.

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