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Abdullah: Success in containing threats

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Malaysia has been successful in containing threats from militant groups in the country, including those from Jemaah Islamiyah and Kumpulan Militan Malaysia now listed as terrorist groups by the United States, said acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Abdullah said the Government had invoked the Internal Security Act against members of the groups but had no plans to freeze the accounts of organisations or individuals linked to JI and KMM.

"We do not accuse any organisation (of sponsoring terrorism)," he said when asked to comment on a report released on Tuesday from Washington that JI and KMM were among 250 terrorist groups listed by the US Government.

He was speaking at a Press conference after opening the Federal Territory MIC convention at the Putra World Trade Centre today.

When pointed out that the United States "expected" countries to freeze the accounts of individuals and organisations labelled as terrorists, Abdullah, who is Home Minister, said Malaysia need not follow Washington's every demand.

"We act based on evidence we gather of militant activities."

To a suggestion that the refusal to freeze the accounts could be seen as Malaysia being not serious in combating terrorism, Abdullah retorted: "We are more serious and we have been more successful in this. They (the United States) know this."

On the refusal by The Economist to apologise over an article which insulted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Abdullah said the Government had written to the London-based magazine expressing reservations against the article titled A Qualified Success.

The magazine replied that it was prepared to correct and apologise for factual misrepresentation but was standing by the views presented in the article.

"It said it was willing to publish our response," he added.

Abdullah was also asked on the increasing number of people quarantined for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, and whether the Government had any plans to direct the police, army and Rela to assist the over-stretched Health Ministry enforce the order.

Abdullah said there was no plan to do so, adding that the ministry had to re-mobilise its personnel to cope with the extra workload.

"Staff from other hospitals and units should be deployed to SARS-designated hospitals and hospitals where people have been quarantined."

When pointed out that it was the home quarantine which was causing concern, Abdullah admitted things would be difficult if people did not co-operate.

"They are being quarantined for their own good and in the interests of the public. We can't station health officials or policemen at every house," he said.