

The Memali incident

THE Memali incident in Kampung Memali in Kedah's Baling district happened at the height of Islamic resurgence in the 1980s. The Nov 19, 1985 incident eventually took 18 lives, including that of Ibrahim Mahmood or Man Libya – the leader of a militant Islamic group – and four police personnel.

In a Feb 25, 1986 White Paper, then Home Minister Datuk Musa Hitam, gave a detailed explanation of what happened, in order to expose "the activities of certain elements, groups and individuals who were abusing and exploiting Islam and the Islamic resurgence for personal or political ends".

On returning to Malaysia after studying in Cairo and Tripoli in Libya, Ibrahim worked as a *pendakwah* (missionary) financed by the Libyan government, while attached to the Religious Division in the Prime Minister's Department. But he soon resigned from his post to be active in politics. He joined PAS and stood for elections in 1978 and 1982, but lost on both occasions.

The White Paper alleges that after this, Ibrahim began zealously explaining and instilling the spirit of *jihad* (holy war) and *syahid* (martyrdom) among party members and supporters.

At the same time, says the White Paper, PAS leaders were also urging members to dub others as infidels and to boycott fellow Muslims in Umno whom they branded as *kafir* (infidels). They refused to pray in the same mosque with Umno members.

Ibrahim's "Islamic extremism" within the Memali community eventually alarmed the authorities, who felt his activities should be nipped.

The first police operation to arrest and detain Ibrahim under the Internal Security Act took place at 1am on Sept 2, 1984 at his house in Kampung Memali. It was aborted because of strong opposition from 100 Ibrahim followers. Ibrahim stayed behind locked doors and refused to come out when asked to give himself up.

Ibrahim soon went into hiding for about a month-and-a-half, and then returned to his house. His supporters set up a system around his house to protect him.

The police made five more attempts throughout 1984 and up to Nov 10, 1985 to persuade Ibrahim to give up peacefully, but to no avail. Events reached a climax on Nov 19, 1985 when a total of 576 police personnel were deployed. The group that moved in from Baling was obstructed by women and children armed with sharpened bamboos and wooden sticks.

When the police approached Ibrahim's house, they were suddenly shot at with firearms, resulting in an inspector and a sergeant being killed on the spot. A constable was seriously wounded and died afterwards.

The police then used an armoured car to break down the gate of Ibrahim's house.

"To defend themselves and to thwart the attacks, the police ultimately had to use firearms," says the White Paper. "Eight of the attackers, including Ibrahim Mahmood, were killed in the yard of the house. Four other supporters of Ibrahim Mahmood were killed by the gate of his house. Another was killed at the back of Ibrahim's house when he and several of his followers attempted to attack the police personnel surrounding the house."

PAS, in a statement read out in Parliament, dissociated itself from the incident, saying Ibrahim acted on his own.