

Dr M: Malaysia knows guerrilla combat, Sulu Sultan 'ignorant'
Malaysian Insider
March 24, 2013
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 24 — Dr Mahathir Mohamad appeared to suggest today that the Sulu insurgents in Sabah were underestimating the ability of Malaysia's security forces, saying self-styled Sultan Jamalul Kiram III's orders for guerrilla warfare was borne of "ignorance".

He pointed out that guerrilla tactics were familiar to Malaysian soldiers and police, whom he also said were willing to die in the defence of their homeland and people out of love for the country.

"Perhaps Jamalul Kiram knows nothing about how Malaysia dealt with the guerrillas," Dr Mahathir wrote in a post on his blog at chedet.cc.

"His suggestion about conducting a guerrilla war in Malaysia seems to be based on ignorance."

Malaysian security forces have killed 63 Sulu militants and arrested 408 suspected supporters since the start of the incursion last month, and yesterday said they have crippled the group's movement with the capture of its military commander.

Local security intelligence believe the group's leader and Jamalul's brother, Agbimuddin Kiram, had abandoned his remaining forces in Sabah's Lahad Datu on March 11 and fled back to southern Philippines where he is currently evading capture by island-hopping. Since clashes began between Agbimuddin's band of 235 rebels and Malaysian forces on March 1, a total of 10 Malaysian lives have been lost — eight policemen and two soldiers.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has been following the decades of violent standoffs by the Moro people in southern Philippines, but added that the situation here is vastly different.

"Malaysia... is well aware that guerrillas can be disruptive. It can render Malaysia less stable and secure.

"But the situation today is much better for Malaysia to defeat any attempt at guerrilla war by the Kiram and Suluks," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this is because the hearts and minds of Malaysians are generally with the government, despite the existence of some detractors from the opposition.

He said the Malaysian government also has enough money to help relocate those who may be terrorised into supporting the invaders, therefore blocking them from strengthening their army with local reinforcements.

But most important of all, the still-influential Dr Mahathir said, were the men and women who make up Malaysia's security forces.

"The soldiers and police who are currently participating in the fight against the terrorist in Lahad Datu are well-trained and well equipped," he said. "The Malaysian forces have inherited the knowledge and the skills in fighting anti-guerrilla wars."

Dr Mahathir said the spirit of patriotism in the Malaysian forces is very high and the attempt by the Sulu militants to frighten them by desecrating the bodies of their comrades had not worked.

"If at all it has made our security personnel very angry and more determine to defeat the enemy. It has become almost a personal war for them," he said.

The former prime minister added an appeal to Malaysians nationwide to be thankful to the local forces for their willingness to die for the country in defence of its sovereignty and the safety of its people.

"If we are safe and secure, if we are stable and free from fear of guerrilla attacks it is because our soldiers and police are ready to die for us.

"I think there is much for us to be grateful about and to say thank you to the people who secure our peace and stability," he said.

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