

Mahathir calls for upgrading of military intelligence-gathering to thwart terror threats

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) to upgrade its efficiency of intelligence-gathering to thwart more complex and challenging terror threats.

The Prime Minister said the threat of war in Malaysia was unlike that in other countries, which may be attacked by a neighbour or superpower and need a huge army for defence, but “a problem of dealing with terrorists”.

“Our problem now is one of dealing with terrorists, and these are people who are ‘invisible’ to us because they are not in any recognisable uniform. We do not know who the terrorists are.

“Our preparations are focused on information, intelligence. We must be able to identify, at an early stage, who a terrorist could be because he (or she) will be undergoing training or has close ties with terrorist groups,” he said at a dialogue with MAF officers and personnel during his maiden visit as the seventh prime minister to the Defence Ministry here.

Dr Mahathir said victory over terrorists was dependent not on the military capability in warfare but on the military capacity for early intelligence-gathering to combat terrorism.

He recalled the challenges he faced as the defence minister from 1981 to 1986, one of which was the threat of the guerilla warfare launched by the now-outlawed Communist Party of Malaya that undermined national development and economic activity.

Dr Mahathir's visit to the defence ministry today was his first as the prime minister after the 14th general election last May. Defence Minister Mohamad Sabu and top ministry officers were present during the visit.

The Prime Minister said that in the current era of globalisation, any change that occurred in any location in the world had an indirect impact and influence on the country's prosperity and stability.

"For example, the tension in the ties between the United States and China affected the economic growth of the world, including in Southeast Asia and Malaysia.

"Hence, the Defence Ministry has the responsibility of studying the effect and developments taking place around the world to assist the government to take appropriate diplomatic decisions while evaluating the suitable equipment which the MAF may need," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had to remain neutral without favouring any superpower and, at the same time, be friendly to large and small countries in the common interest.

He noted that the Defence Ministry was preparing a White Paper outlining the defence principles and strategies as well as an MAF capacity development plan and the current challenges facing the ministry.

"It will enhance transparency and the people's understanding of the importance of defence and security, their support for new security issues and challenges, and invite them to share the responsibility of defending the country," he said.

Dr Mahathir advised the ministry to take the appropriate measures, particularly in terms of financial management, to enhance itself and for the officers to be given the appropriate training on an ongoing basis to ensure that Malaysia was known for its efficient governance.

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