

Our troops to stay put in Cambodia

By Juhaidi
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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said Malaysia will not pull out its troops from Cambodia unless asked to do so by the United Nations.

The Prime Minister said by being an element in the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (Untac), Malaysian troops were under the orders of the world body and would react to its instructions.

He was responding to the concern raised by some quarters that Malaysian troops might be in danger considering the deteriorating situation in Cambodia.

Malaysia has about 850 troops serving as peacekeepers besides scores of military officers as observers, civilian and military police personnel and Royal

Malaysian Air Force men running some of the airports in the country.

Asked to comment on Japan's decision to recall its civilian policemen to Phnom Penh following the killing of a Japanese police inspector, Dr Mahathir said he would prefer to refrain from questioning the moves of other parties serving with Untac.

"As far we are concerned, we hold on to UN's instructions," he told reporters after making a surprise visit to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Subang.

The Prime Minister, however, said he was concerned with the safety of the Malaysian troops, who he felt should be well-equipped with arms and bullet-proof vests in order to be able to carry out their tasks better.

Dr Mahathir said he was only touring to see some of the duty free shops being set

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up and was happy with the progress.

When asked whether he was conducting a "spot check" on the security of the airport, he said he was not.

At a separate Press conference, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Malaysia stood by the principles of the UN mandate and would not withdraw unilaterally from the peacekeeping force.

"We are part of a combined force of 22,000 peacekeepers deployed in Cambodia. As such, we must remain a team player."

However, Abdullah, who had just returned from the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting in Karachi and an official visit to Saudi Arabia, felt Untac should provide better protection to the peacekeepers in the face of attacks from the Khmer Rouge

guerillas.

So far, eight peacekeepers have died in attacks since last month.

Nevertheless, Abdullah commended the work of Untac and rejected the notion that it has failed in its mission.

"It is unfair to come to that conclusion. The situation in Cambodia is both difficult and complex, and I'm sure, it has not been easy for (Untac civilian chief Yasushi) Akashi," he said.

Abdullah was against the idea of postponing the date of the polls scheduled for May 23-27, saying that it would mean a "victory" for the Khmer Rouge.

He said all concerned parties should work towards achieving the objectives of the 1991 Paris peace agreement, one of which was to hold the UN-supervised elections, he added.