

ACT OF WAR

STAR - 3 DEC 2002

PM: We will act against those who intrude into our country

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PUTRAJAYA: Any attempt by another country to carry out assassinations or enforce its laws within the borders of Malaysia will be considered an act of war.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that Malaysia, as a sovereign nation, would never allow anyone or any country to carry out its laws within Malaysian territory.

"If they intrude into our country, we will take action according to our own laws to protect our sovereignty and independence.

"If these people use unmanned aircraft or helicopters and missiles to carry out assassinations against certain targets in our country, we will deem this as an act of war.

"We will consider this as an attempt to launch a war against the Government and country of Malaysia," the Prime Minister told reporters before breaking fast at Seri

Perdana here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on a statement by Australian Prime Minister John Howard that he was prepared to act against terrorists in neighbouring Asian countries and that international laws and the United Nations Charter should be changed to empower nations to strike pre-emptively against terrorists who plan to attack them.

His comments sparked immediate outrage from governments across Asia.

Howard's comments came in the wake of the Oct 12 bombing of a resort in Bali, Indonesia, in which nearly 200 people - almost half of them Australian tourists - were killed.

Asked if such pre-emptive strikes on the part of Australia could destabilise the region, Dr Mahathir said he opposed any measure by a foreign nation to "take over" another country and that Malaysia would never allow it to happen.

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slam 'arrogant' statement by Howard

Dr Mahathir said such actions would, in the end, only cause dire consequences. He felt that this was not the way to fight terrorism.

"If anybody has any information on activities in Malaysia which can affect or cause harm to other nations, it is the person's duty to alert us and we will take action according to our laws, provided of course there is a basis for the accusation," he said.

Asked if he felt "disappointed" by Australia's latest stance, after Malaysia had extended such good co-operation to the country to help track down terrorist activities, Dr Mahathir said:

"Not only disappointed. But (Howard's stand) was arrogant. In the midst of so many Asian countries, Australia sticks out like a sore thumb.

"This country is trying to impose its European values on Asia, as if these are still the good old days where people can shoot at Aborigines without caring about human rights while at the same time, talking about it (rights).

"For them, anything goes, including assassinations."

What Australia was actually saying, by Howard's statement, was that it had the right to assassinate peo-

ple in other countries. Dr Mahathir said.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar described Howard's statement as "arrogant."

"We take strong exception with his statement. It shows a lack of sensitivity and understanding of the laws and how the international system works."

Syed Hamid said combatting terrorism called for co-

operation of many nations.

"It is not justified for one country to invade another to fight terrorism. Australia is not helping efforts to fight terrorism with this kind of statement," he added.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak reiterated that Malaysia would not stand for soldiers from other countries conducting operations in the country.

NICK LEONG reports in Kuala Lumpur.

Najib said the presence of foreign soldiers would create negative sentiments and complicate matters.

"We have the capabilities and resources to deal with any form of terrorist threat," he said after a function at the Defence Ministry.

He said Malaysia would co-operate with other coun-

tries in the global war against terrorism.

He said the Government had even supported the setting up of a regional centre for counter-terrorism.

Umno Youth described as "rude and arrogant" the statement by Howard.

Bernama quoted its International Bureau chief Dr Shamsul Anwar Sulaiman as calling Howard "stupid," and said that Australia had no right whatsoever to encroach into any country in Asia although it suspected there were subversive activities in the region.

The DAP joined in the chorus of protest, voicing its strong objections to Howard's comments.

Describing it as a most dangerous form of state terrorism, national chairman Lim Kit Siang said it would undermine the United Nations, weaken international law and plunge the world into a "new world of lawlessness."

Calling it Howard's adoption of US President George W. Bush's doctrine of unilateral pre-emptive attack, Lim urged Asean nations to collectively reject this as it "would make nonsense" of the UN Charter and set the clock back more than half a century to pre-Second World War.