

KL may review co-operation with Canberra

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By NICK LEONG

KUALA LUMPUR: The Government will review its co-operation with Australia if it persists in blaming Malaysia for its own inability to prevent acts of terrorism, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said the Government had been co-operating as much as it could with other countries in the war against terrorism.

"But if they are going to blame us, then we are going to re-think about co-operating with them," he told reporters here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir added that Australia was going to lose out in South-East Asia if its government's present attitude remained.

"Certainly they are not going to be very welcome (in South-East Asia)," he said.

He added that Malaysians and Australians had always gotten along fine.

"We have good relations with Australians as a people. They are here, we do business with them and we send our students to study there because they have good schools and teachers but they have a leader who is totally

insensitive.

"Not all Australians support this kind of arrogant attitude of (Australian Prime Minister John) Howard.

"He has obviously been very arrogant and we have never had any good relations with him at all," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked whether Asean members would make a collective stand against pre-emptive strikes by foreign countries against terrorists in the region, Dr Mahathir said not all Asean members thought alike.

"Maybe there are some Asean countries which will welcome it but not all of them have made (known) their stand. The Philippines is obviously critical, so is Indonesia. I don't know about Thailand. Other countries have not responded," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Non-Aligned Movement meeting here next year would probably make a stand on the different views held by world powers and smaller nations in tackling terrorism.

He said developed countries were not able to "think straight" anymore since the Sept 11 event.

"They do things which only

aggravate matters, not in the interest of fighting terrorists," he said.

The MCA Youth urged Howard to re-look his foreign policy towards Asia as it has failed to build a meaningful relationship between Asia and Australia.

Its international affairs bureau chief Fam Lee Ee said Howard has refused to recognise the importance of having a strong relationship with Asia.

"Howard still thinks that Australia is located in Europe or North America, which is tragic. Unless Howard emphasises more importance towards Asia, there will be a diplomatic strain between Asia and Australia," he said in a statement.

He said the clarification by Foreign Minister Alexander Downer would not help to mend the deteriorating ties between many Asian countries and Australia.

"Howard needs to seriously and sincerely work on improving relations with senior Asian leaders, who are deeply disturbed by Howard who seems to be playing a deputy sheriff for the United States in this region," added Fam.