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PM: We'll not allow Aussie troops to be deployed here

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ALOR STAR, Thurs. - Malaysia will not allow Australia to deploy its troops here as part of Canberra's anti-terrorism campaign, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Not to Malaysia ...in Malaysia, we do not accept (Australian troops)," Dr Mahathir replied when asked to comment on Australian Prime Minister John Howard's statement on the matter yesterday.

Howard was quoted as saying that Australia might need to send its troops to Southeast Asia in its war against terrorism following the Oct 12 Bali bombing which killed nearly 180 people.

Howard was also quoted as saying that Australia was likely to increase defence and security spending.

Speaking after launching the Islamic Dakwah Foundation of Malaysia (Yadim) and Kedah Umno's Gerak Mesra and Tazkirah programme here, Dr Mahathir said any deployment of Australian troops to the region could cause the soldiers to be targets of terrorist activities.

"I hold the view that if Australian or other foreign troops are placed in the region, they may themselves become targets.

"So while we remain peaceful, they become exposed to violent actions."

On another matter, Dr Mahathir expressed Malaysia's disappointment over the indefinite postponement of the G-15 Heads of Government meeting scheduled to be held in Venezuela for five days beginning Saturday due to political uncertainty in that country.

Dr Mahathir, who was to attend the meeting, said it was unfortunate because the meeting had already been postponed once before.

"I am disappointed because I feel this to be a pact of countries of the South.

"However, we find these countries sometimes face many problems to the extent that we cannot hold meetings due to a lack of quorum."

The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the seventh summit, scheduled to be held from Oct 26 to 30 on Margarita Island, had been cancelled. It was informed by the Malaysian embassy in Caracas of the cancellation.