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A crude display of arrogance by Aussie PM, say Malaysians

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Malaysians interviewed criticised Australian Prime Minister John Howard for wanting to take preemptive strikes against terrorists in other countries, describing the statement as "uncalled-for".

They agreed with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that Malaysia was a "sovereign and independent nation" and would not allow any foreign country to impose their laws within its territory.

Part-time administrator Nenry Chew, 31, an Indonesian married to a Malaysian, said it was "all just an excuse" as Western countries had long wanted to interfere in the affairs of Asian countries.

"The (Oct 12) Bali bombings (in which about 200 people, mostly Australians, were killed) may have caused fear, but there is no confirmation about the culprits. They (Australia) cannot do what they want," she said.

Businessman Dr Mohamed Aminudeen Abdul Hamid, 40, said Australia should "stop babbling" and instead initiate talks.

"This is not solely an Australian issue, but also one that involves its neighbours. It is unfair for them to come up with a unilateral decision on the intrusion with disregard to others," he said.

Graduate Jen Chong, 21, said: "They cannot just attack based on that (fear) factor because after that they could just always use that reason, perhaps with underlying motives. He should have brought the matter up in a more diplomatic manner."

She said the Australian Government should raise the issue in a formal setting with Asian countries.

Howard had said on Sunday that the United Nations charter should be changed to allow a country to launch strikes against any threat, whether conventional or terrorist.

Dr Mahathir retorted yesterday that "if anyone tries to carry out his laws within our borders, then we will consider that an act of aggression and we will take action under our laws."

Retiree Jesmil Singh, 64, said Australia had always shown disrespect to its neighbours.

"We are a nobody to them ... their decision only reflects their arrogance and they are of the opinion that they are mightier and above everyone else. Look at the way they treat our ministers despite actually being invited over."

Homemaker Jay Bukari, 25, said Howard should respect Malaysian rules and if the tables were turned Australia would never allow such measures themselves.

"They (Australia) have their rules, we have ours. Any other country would not allow our Government to impose the same thing on them anyway!" she said.

A. Jayabalan, a 30-year-old restaurant supervisor, said Malaysians could take care of terrorist threats in the country and did not need Australia to interfere.

"They have nothing to do here, it is us Malaysians who take care of our own security. We have the expertise. Just look at how we caught the Al-Maunah members and other terrorist groups. The country is capable and safe and it is not right for Howard to say that," he said.

College student Catherine Chong, 18, expressed fear about the possibility of war if Australia launched attacks against Asian countries.

"The repercussions of America attacking Iraq are already fearful enough and this is much worse as it is closer to home. Why must Australia decide so abruptly to launch strikes against its neighbours? It will not bring good to anyone.

"If it was all about protecting its people from harm and possible terrorist attacks, why don't they force their people to leave countries they deem threatening," she said, adding that intrusion into other countries would only aggravate anger and violence.

Exteacher R. Guru, 60, said she agreed with Dr Mahathir that Malaysia would not allow others to carry out laws within the country.

"He is quite right and we have done very well all these years with the terrorists who were in our country. We should be given credit for how we handled the communist terrorists. Incidents like the Bali bombings are happening all over the world ... it is a kind of chain reaction," she said.

She hoped the war on terrorism would be kept "under control" and that other countries would enjoy the stability that Malaysia has.

"We have always had peace here ... I also hope that other countries have the same kind of strong faith we have in our leader Dr Mahathir."

Lecturer E.H. Lim, 60, perceived Australia's declaration as a subtle approach to colonisation and that as a developed nation the country had been waiting for the opportunity to exert its power on neighbouring countries they assumed were weak.

"The excuse they gave to wage war is just not substantial enough. Would it be justified if someone were to attack his neighbour if his valuables in his neighbour's keeping were stolen despite it being well looked after?"

"Our Government has always ensured the safety of foreigners here. In fact, it suffices to say tourists' protection here is equal to that of locals."

Sales executive Angel Eh, 30, said there was no need for other countries to impose their measures in Malaysia as the country would "do extremely well for itself" in terms of security.

"Maybe Howard wants to protect his own citizens, but he must understand his opinions are very different from ours in this issue. I agree with Dr Mahathir. We do not want them to step in to do what they want. We are just fine without others' interference."

Singaporean Sou Chew Guan, 41, said Australia had once again displayed its arrogance.

"Not only do I find Howard's remarks racist, but his plan to intrude will only cause anger and violence. What gives them the right to simply want to barge into their neighbours' land and create unrest?"

"We don't need them to tell us what to do as we are more than capable of handling the problem ourselves," he said.

Sou lauded Dr Mahathir's response to Australia, saying that it was exactly how any other country would react.

"It's about protecting the sovereignty of a country ... war should be avoided at all costs but a country has to do what it has to do if its integrity is ravaged," he said.

He said Australia should be taught a lesson and the time had come for Asian countries to stand against these "attacks".