

24 OCT 2002

Mahathir-Australia

MALAYSIA WILL NOT ACCEPT AUSTRALIAN TROOPS IN MALAYSIA

ALOR STAR, Oct 24 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will not accept the presence of Australian troops in the country in the fight against terrorism in Southeast Asia, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The prime minister said the presence of Australian troops anywhere in the region might in fact make them the targets of terrorists.

"If they are stationed in any place, they may become targets. So, while we're at peace now, (with their presence) we may be open to terrorism," he told a media conference after attending the Kubang Pasu Umno division meeting, here.

He was asked to comment on Australian Prime Minister John Howard's statement that Australia might send its troops to the region to fight terrorism.

Howard's statement came on the heels of the Oct 12 bombings in Bali which killed at least 183 people, many of whom were Australians.

On the cancellation of the G-15 meeting, scheduled for Oct 26-30 in Venezuela, following an attempt to revolt in that country, Dr Mahathir said he regretted the cancellation because the meeting involved the countries of the South.

"I'm very disappointed because we feel that this an alliance of the South countries and we find that these countries often face many problems to the extent that they cannot get a full quorum for meetings and so forth," he said.

Dissident Venezuelan military officers in Venezuela had tried to muster support for a popular revolt against leftist President Hugo Chavez but the armed forces said they firmly opposed a rebellion.

The G-15 set up in 1989 comprises Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

The last G-15 meeting was held in Jakarta last year.

-- BERNAMA

JM JK