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Mahathir-Australia

M'SIA MAY RETHINK COOPERATION WITH AUSTRALIA, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 4 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia may have to rethink its cooperation with Australia in fighting terrorism if Canberra continues to blame others for purportedly not doing enough to wipe out the scourge.

The prime minister said the attitude of the Australian government in dealing with terrorism would certainly not be very welcome and this might cause it to lose out in the war against terror.

"We are cooperating as much as we can today in the fight against terrorism. But if they are going to blame us, we will have to rethink about cooperating with them," he told reporters after visiting Siamese twins Azama and Azami Kamarulzaman, who have been successfully separated, at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital here.

Dr Mahathir was responding to questions surrounding the statement by Australian Prime Minister John Howard on Sunday that he would not hesitate to launch pre-emptive strikes against terrorists in neighbouring countries if they planned to attack Australian interests.

This has sparked angry reactions from around the region but Howard yesterday denied that his comments about possible pre-emptive action against terrorists in other countries had damaged Australia's relations with its neighbours.

When asked whether the Asean countries should make a collective stand against Australia, Dr Mahathir said: "I do not know what is the attitude of Asean countries.

"(Not) all of them have made their stand. The Philippines is obviously critical. So is Indonesia. I don't know about Thailand, other countries have not responded. So we cannot say it is Asean's stand at the moment," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would continue to oppose it if Australia tried to intrude in Malaysia without permission.

"It's alright, he can make his decision. If he comes to our country, we know what to do," he said.

-- BERNAMA

RZS MAM JK