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PM warns of ruthless nations (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today hinted that certain countries in the region would consider using Malaysia as their battlefield in the event of war.

The Prime Minister said these countries believed that by adopting such a strategy, they would be able to prevent the horror of war from reaching their shores.

"Yes, we have heard that if there is to be war, their defence would be by preventing it from reaching their borders. Malaysia will be turned into their battlefield so that war will not reach their countries."

Dr Mahathir said this when asked to elaborate on his New Year's message that some countries claimed they had the right to take "pre-emptive action" or "forward defence" that would affect Malaysia.

He was speaking at a Press conference after attending a New Year open house hosted by the People's Progressive Party at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Asked if he was referring to Singapore, Dr Mahathir said:

"That's your assumption, not mine."

In his New Year's message, the Prime Minister had warned: "We promise that if anyone violates our freedom, they will get what they (Westerners) call a 'bloody nose'."

On the issue of terrorism, Dr Mahathir said claims that Malaysia was unsafe and could fall victim to terror attacks had been proven baseless.

He said the recent Hari Raya and Christmas open house and the New Year celebrations in many parts of the country last night, which attracted hundreds of thousands of people, were proof of how safe Malaysia was.

"I did not see any terrorists," he said. "This was a good chance for them to do a lot of damage as there were many people crammed into one street or area.

"But last night, as far as we could see, everybody was feeling very safe; they were celebrating, they were happy."

Dr Mahathir said claims that Malaysia was a dangerous country were "a lot of nonsense".

"They make these claims based on something that we cannot understand. In fact, we see more terrorist attacks in their countries but here in Malaysia, we are all safe."

Dr Mahathir was also asked about the impasse over the price of water sold to Singapore, to which he said Malaysia "would think of something to resolve it".

He added that Malaysia had not considered taking the matter to arbitration.