

Best to discuss disputes with neighbours: PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, 14 Sept. — Malaysia feels that the best way to resolve territorial water disputes with its neighbours is through discussions, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said when Malaysia published its map to show the extent of its territorial waters and its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), it made it clear that anybody who disputed the country's territorial claims was entitled to express objections.

"Since a number of countries

did not raise objections, we assumed we were in the right.

"However, we think the best way to resolve any objections is to have discussions."

Dr Mahathir was responding to questions during a Press conference at the Defence Ministry headquarters. He had earlier addressed an annual symposium of Armed Forces senior officers on various aspects of Government policy.

Commenting on various Press reports from the Philippines yesterday claiming that

the Royal Malaysian Navy had encroached into Philippine waters 17 times this year and had shot at their fishermen, he said:

"I have not been told of any diplomatic protest note from the Philippines but as far as we are concerned, our ships were in our waters.

"We are quite willing to discuss with the Philippines if it can show a rightful claim.

"We ourselves have experienced a lot of encroachment of our territorial waters by foreign fishing vessels and we have a right to take action whether they are from the Philippines or other countries."

Dr Mahathir said during the time of his predecessor Tun Hussein Onn, there was a problem of overlapping territorial waters with Thailand.

"However, this was solved when the two countries agreed that a certain area of the sea should be regarded as jointly belonging to Malaysia and Thailand.

"The problem was thus resolved without any bitterness and physical fights, and I think that is the best way for two countries to resolve their territorial disputes."

On the disapproving remarks made by a Chinese Government spokesman last week against Trade and Industry Minister Datin Paduka Rafidah Aziz's visit to Taiwan, Dr Mahathir said:

"It was not an official visit. She went because we have a need to encourage investments into our country.

"We do not recognise Taiwan as a separate State, so we have not breached our understanding with Peking on its status."