

# We will act to halt encroachment says Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The Government will take the necessary action to prevent foreign encroachment into the country's territorial waters, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We have the right to take action against any foreign vessel encroaching into our waters," the Prime Minister told reporters here.

He was commenting on allegations by several Philippine congressmen that Malaysian navy boats had intruded into Philippine waters and fired upon Filipino fishermen near the Turtle Islands.

"As far as we are concerned our ships were in our territorial waters.

"This (kind of action) had not only happened to the Philippines. Other countries have been treated in the same way and they understand that if they encroach into Malaysian territorial waters we have the right to take action," Dr Mahathir said.

However, Dr Mahathir added that any country which disputed Malaysia's claims was entitled to express its objections.

"When we published our map to show our territorial waters and exclusive economic zone, we made it clear that anybody disputing our claims can express their objections.

"Since a number of countries did not object, we assumed we are in the right.

"We think the best way to resolve any problem is to have discussions between the parties concerned. If they can show a right to their claims then we can have talks, but we need a comprehensive so-

lution to the problem," Dr Mahathir added.

Citing an example, Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia and Thailand had been able to settle disputes over territorial claims amicably.

"We had problems with Thailand. During the time of my predecessor (Tun Hussein Onn) this was cleared when the two countries agreed that there were certain areas of the sea which should be regarded as jointly belonging to Malaysia and Thailand.

"It was resolved without any bitterness or physical fight and I think it is the best way for countries to resolve matters involving which territory belongs to whom," he added.

Asked if Malaysia was ready for talks over claims on the Spratly Islands, Dr Mahathir said: "We are always ready to talk to anybody about rights to the Spratlys. What we have done is merely to ensure that our EEZ is under our control and that nobody encroaches into it."

To another question, Dr Mahathir said there was no need for national service. "The situation in the country now does not warrant it."

Dr Mahathir said he did not foresee any need for Malaysians having to be "knowledgeable in the use of weapons."

Some people might put their knowledge of weapons to criminal use.

"Also, many people will be worried and may leave the country if we have national service. We may have to stop them from returning and this will create dissatisfaction."