

# Dr M: Spratlys

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settled

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — The claims to the Spratly Islands by several countries can be settled through negotiations, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said Malaysia believed in discussions over the matter and said he hoped that other countries making similar claims believed in the same principle.

Responding to questions on the Spratlys after opening a MCA Youth exhibition on "Youth in nation-building" at Lot 10 here, Dr Mahathir said there was no whipping-up of military strength by any country in the region.

The Spratlys are a cluster of reefs and isles straddling major shipping lanes and may sit atop vast deposits of oil and gas.

The islands are claimed wholly or in part by China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan and the Philippines.

To another question, Dr Mahathir said it was all right to have communal political parties but that it was very important that parties which represented the different races co-operated with each other.

"We feel this is vital and that is why we formed the then Alliance and now the Barisan Nasional so that the respective communities can administer the country jointly.

"Even opposition parties realise that this is important. Otherwise they cannot fare well in general elections," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this also applied to the associations and other organisations.