

# Dr M': Talks must be based on agreed principles

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By WONG CHUN WAI

TOKYO: Malaysia wants negotiations on the multi-lateral claims in the South China Sea to be based on agreed principles, Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** said yesterday.

He said once such principles were agreed to, the countries must stick to

*overseas trip's*  
them and should not come up with new principles.

He said if the countries talked about legal basis, then negotiations to resolve any conflict must be confined to legal issues.

This was conveyed to Vietnamese First Deputy Prime Minister Phan Van Khai during their 30-minute meeting yesterday.

The two leaders are

here to attend a three-day international conference on Asia's role in the changing world order.

Malaysian Ambassador Datuk H.M. Khatib said Dr Mahathir felt that based on such principles, countries should not introduce historical basis.

At the briefing for Malaysian journalists, Khatib said if negotiations

were based on **accepted principles**, then **negotiations would** always be successful.

The Spratlys, located at the South China Sea, is being claimed by China, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan.

The group of islands and atolls is said to be rich in gas, oil and other

minerals. It is also considered a militarily strategic area.

The security situation in the South China Sea is also expected to be a key issue during the first full-scale formal talks between **Asean** and its seven **dialogue** partners at senior official level in Singapore on May 20.

The (Malaysian) Prime

Minister said he was taking a personal interest in this issue and he hopes it can be resolved through negotiations and that it is important to **relations in** South-East Asia," Khatib said.

On other bilateral issues, Khatib said Vietnam considered Malaysia a

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# Malaysia wants a rich and prosperous Vietnam

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model country and appreciated Kuala Lumpur's considerable assistance.

Phan, he said, had told Dr Mahathir that "there are so many officials who want to visit Malaysia, they have been directed to be more specific on what they want to do" during their visit.

Phan had said Vietnam did not wish to burden Malaysia with the visits of these officials but Dr Mahathir replied that Kuala Lumpur would welcome any requests for assistance and training from Hanoi.

Khatib said Dr Mahathir was also confident that with Vietnam's big population, comprising a large, skilful and dedicated workforce, it would become a successful and rich country.

"Dr Mahathir said Malaysia will like to see a rich, prosperous Vietnam because Malaysia will not be able to trade with poor countries," Khatib added.

Yesterday evening, Dr Mahathir attended the opening of the conference, organised by the New York-based Asia Society.

The conference was opened by Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa.

Dr Mahathir will speak on the East Asian Economic Caucus and the emergence of trading blocs today.