

We are not preparing for war, says Dr M

NEW DELHI: South-East Asian countries are spending more on defence but have no intention of becoming a threat to their neighbours.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said these nations, including Malaysia, were merely replacing their outdated defence equipment.

"There is no provocation and we are not preparing for any war," he told a press conference for Indian and Malaysian journalists at the end of his three-day visit here yesterday.

He was asked to give

reasons for the region's spending spree on arms and whether it would send the wrong signals to the neighbours.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia was reviewing its defence equipment and when one bought such defence hardware, naturally money was spent on the latest ones.

We are now in the process of changing our equipment. As countries become richer, they would want to allocate money for their defence and when they are richer, the amount allocated will

be more," he added.

Dr Mahathir said China was getting rich and would certainly want to spend more on defence.

"Even if they allocate the same percentage for their armed forces, that percentage in real terms will be very big," he said.

Asked whether India could be included in the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec), Dr Mahathir said it was a geographical based grouping.

He said India could not be regarded as a Pacific Rim country but said he could not understand why

many nations in the Pacific Rim, especially those in the South Pacific, were not welcomed into Apec.

Dr Mahathir suggested that Russia should also be included in Apec, adding that there would be great resistance if India attempted to join it.

On what had led to the recent Malaysian-Australian diplomatic row, Dr Mahathir said Australia often felt that it had a duty to instruct Malaysia on how to run the country, how to behave and what it should do on human rights and democracy.

"Australians seem to

think they have a monopoly of these things but we don't think so and we tell them so," he added.

As for his meeting with his Indian counterpart N.V. Narasimha Rao, Dr Mahathir said the focus was on greater bilateral co-operation since India was opening up its market.

"The possibility for joint ventures is much more than ever. Malaysian businessmen like to take part in joint ventures in areas like transportation and telecommunications," he said.