

Dr M: Stand on air strikes stays

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Malaysia's request to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) to provide more effective arms for its troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina should not be misconstrued as a change in position on the proposed bombing of Serb positions, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said Malaysian troops were using their own weapons which were not as effective as those being used by the French, British or other peacekeeping forces.

"Actually we should be helped through the supply of more effective arms. Nev-

ertheless, I wish to stress that we are committed to the peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"I hope there will not be any quarters who misconstrue it as a change of stand by Malaysia or that we are afraid our forces in Unprofor (United Nations Protection Forces) will be attacked and thus do not want the bombing of Serb gun emplacements," he said at a Press conference at Seri Perdana here.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had yet to receive a reply from the United Nations on the application for more effective arms for its troops.

Malaysia has 1,500 troops

led by Kol Hashim Hussein serving with Unprofor in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The soldiers are equipped with light arms such as rifles and mortars, suitable for their mission as peacekeepers.

Dr Mahathir had stated on Thursday that Malaysia would ask Nato to arm Malaysian soldiers serving with the UN peacekeeping force in Bosnia-Herzegovina if Nato launched an attack on Serb positions around Sarajevo.

He said this would enable Malaysian soldiers to adequately defend themselves.

The Prime Minister had said that it was Nato's re-

sponsibility to equip Malaysian soldiers with suitable arms to defend themselves as their primary duty had hitherto been peacekeeping.

Dr Mahathir had also said Malaysia would seek such assistance from other multinational peacekeeping forces in the event Nato refused to accede to the request.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia feared the entry of Russian peacekeeping troops.

"Peacekeeping troops from Turkey were not allowed in because of their alleged allegiance to the Bosnians.

"But it is clear that Russia

is sympathetic to the Serbs but it has been allowed to send its troops.

"Is this being fair or is it another instance of double standards?" he asked.

Dr Mahathir said it was possible that Russian troops could be stationed near the Serb gun emplacements so that there may not be any bombing.

"We are seeing hypocrisy working at its best," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there would be no bombing of Serb positions when Nato's deadline for ending the siege of the Bosnian capital

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Najib: We'll follow UN plan if Serbs strike back

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expired at midnight today (8am Malaysian time tomorrow).

Meanwhile, *Bernama* reports that Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the Malaysian Battalion (Malbatt) in Bosnia-Herzegovina has a contingency plan should the Serb aggressors retaliate in response to UN-ordered air strikes.

He said the plan would be based on the overall plan of the UN.

"We will leave it to the UN to take the necessary action," he said in an interview on TV3's *Sekapur Sirih* programme today.

He said the Malbatt troops in Sarajevo would be withdrawn to a safer location if the situation grew more tense.

Only two Malbatt platoons consisting of 65 men with several armoured personnel carriers were in Sarajevo while the rest of the battalion was based elsewhere, he added.

Najib said he still did not believe Nato would carry

out its threat to launch air strikes after its 10-day deadline to the Serbs to pull back their artillery ringing Sarajevo.

He said the Serbs would not hand over their weapons to the UN although there were reports that they had withdrawn them 12km away from Sarajevo.

"The situation has placed Nato in a no-win position."

Meanwhile, Kol Hashim who was also interviewed on the programme by telephone from Bosnia-Herzegovina, said tension was easing in Sarajevo compared with a few days ago.

All Malbatt troops were safe and their families need not worry, he said.

Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the UN, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, who was also interviewed by telephone from New York, said Nato should broaden its threatened air strikes to include other towns.

"There is no one who can prevent the Serb aggressors from using the heavy weapons they withdrew against other towns in their bid to

destroy Bosnia," he said.

"We are disappointed, saddened and angry. This is an unjust situation and raises the suspicion that there may be countries in Europe which do not want Bosnia to survive."

He said the Bosnian Government was being pressured to continue negotiations even though true peace was impossible to realise since the Serbs controlled 70 per cent of the disputed territory.

It was clear now, he said, that the air strikes by Nato would not be carried out because of intervention by Russia which disappointed Malaysia and members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

Razali said these countries were suspicious of the close ties between Russia and Serbia, and viewed the Russian troops in Bosnia as strengthening the Serb stance in the peace talks.

"We do not want the presence of Russian troops to add to the pressure on Bosnia to agree to an unjust peace," he said.