

Conflicts will not be resolved through PM: Diplomacy is use of military force our way

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LANGKAWI, Mon. -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government would hold firmly to the principles of diplomacy in resolving problems and not through the use of military force.

The Prime Minister said, however, a reserve strategic force which was operational and always ready to be deployed swiftly was also needed.

"Hopefully, the Armed Forces Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) will be that force," Dr Mahathir said when he declared the 2,500-strong unit operational today, adding that it would give the Government an option to resolve conflicts.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was aware that a peaceful and stable situation in and outside the country was a prerequisite for the nation in meeting the targets set under Vision 2020.

"Prosperity and national harmony will not last if these conditions are not maintained, enhanced and protected.

"We cannot afford to be complacent in defending the national interests that encompass independence, peace, harmony and prosperity. Neither can we depend on others to protect and defend our interests," Dr Mahathir added.

The Prime Minister said he was aware of the importance of the role of the armed forces in the national administrative system. Based on this, the Government had outlined in the National Defence Policy that a professional, clean and credible armed forces be developed.

Dr Mahathir said: "Such qualities are to help project a deterrent effect. To

achieve this objective, the armed forces must have quality leadership, modern equipment, systematic training and sufficient and high quality logistics systems."

Malaysia's success in countering all challenges to the nation's security was the result of the co-operation and unity of purpose between the Government, its security forces and all sectors of the nation including the private sector, the Prime Minister said.

This understanding was important in meeting the nation's defence, he added.

He said that this was the total defence concept, adding that security was a question not only for the security forces alone but also the responsibility of all citizens.

Dr Mahathir said: "The strength of a nation rests on the shoulders of its people who are equally committed and ever ready to defend its sovereignty. This is the objective and spirit that we must have."

The armed forces were supporting the nation's foreign policy by serving under the United Nations flag. Even though Malaysia was a small nation, it had done its part in promoting efforts towards peace, justice and freedom, Dr Mahathir said.

"I am proud of our armed forces' abilities under the UN. In carrying out their duties, they have shown the quality of professionalism that is comparable to countries which are more developed," Dr Mahathir said.

He added that the Government would continue to help the UN in trying to resolve conflicts which threatened world peace, justice and freedom. Efforts must therefore be made to ensure that those serving

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RDF may be sent for UN peacekeeping, says Dr M

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under the UN be properly trained and sufficiently equipped, Dr Mahathir said.

He said that as a reflection of the Government's commitment to help modernise the armed forces, it had allocated RM8.411 billion or 14.4 per cent under the Sixth Malaysia Plan to buy new equipment such as the MiG-29 air superiority jets, and the F/A-18D Hornet fighter aircraft, warships and other sophisticated weapons.

"These purchases are purely to upgrade the conventional warfare capabilities of the armed forces and to replace obsolete equipment. It's not meant to compete with any other country," he said.

He hoped the armed forces would also give emphasis to raising the educational levels of their officers because of their increasing involvement in international forums as well as the use of sophisticated and modern equipment and weapons.

Asked to comment further on the RDF, the Prime Minister said any decision to deploy the unit overseas

would be on a case-by-case basis even though the requests might come from friendly countries.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's neighbours should have no fear over the setting up of the RDF.

"There is no country which does not have the force. All have their own RDFs," he said.

"We may send the RDF (to these countries) based on the situation. After all, we, too, might find ourselves in some tight spots and may seek the help of other countries."

Dr Mahathir added that the Government was willing to consider giving funds to build up the RDF. "However, this is unlikely to take place in the Sixth Malaysia Plan," he said.

Asked what were the other roles being allocated to the RDF, Dr Mahathir said the unit could be sent for peacekeeping operations under the UN banner.

Armed Forces Chief Jen Tan Sri Borhan Ahmad said the RDF as a strategic and tactical assault force would have to be mobile, lethal and able to react swiftly.