

Dr M stays above controversy

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday refused to be drawn into the controversy surrounding US Vice-President Al Gore's provoking remarks and support for the *reformasi* movement saying what needed to be said on the issue had already been said.

However, he said there was a limit as to how much bashing and assault the police personnel could take from the demonstrators who had become violent.

Speaking at a press conference at the end of the Apec Summit, Dr Mahathir said the police had treated demonstrators well.

"But of course if they beat up the police, are you expecting the police to just submit to their beating? Even the police are human. If you beat them up they have to defend themselves," he said when asked about talk of a clampdown on demonstrations in the next few days.

Newsmen were eager to get a reaction from the Prime Minister after Gore insulted Malaysia at a dinner on Monday.

However, Dr Mahathir was very abrupt in his replies to questions relating to Gore which ranged from whether he had any personal discussion with Gore and his personal relations with the US vice-president.

When asked whether he shared Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's views that

any outbreak of violence would be a result of an incitement by the United States, Dr Mahathir replied: "I stand by my foreign minister."

On Anwar's article which appeared in the *Asian Wall Street Journal* yesterday where he made recommendations to Apec leaders, Dr Mahathir replied: "A lot of nonsense is coming out from him in the foreign media."

Earlier, Malaysia played the perfect host to leaders of the Apec economies at Cyberview, a tropical resort in the heart of the Multimedia Super Corridor nestled among lush vegetation.

The leaders at their re-

treat posed for a photo shoot at 9am before adjourning for their meeting.

They were clad in Malaysian-made batik shirts.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jenny Shipley — the rose among the thorns — stood out in her blue batik baju kebaya, complete with a matching selendang.

And when the leaders broke for lunch, Dr Mahathir played the perfect host.

Gore and Dr Mahathir were seen walking together at one point during a short walk to the Verandah for lunch.

The Malaysian leader appeared cordial to his

American guest and exchanged a few words with him.

The Apec leaders continued their meeting after lunch and at 5pm they gathered by the scenic poolside overlooking the oil palm plantations where Dr Mahathir, the chairman of the sixth Apec Summit, read out the Kuala Lumpur Declaration.

After the declaration, Dr Mahathir diplomatically brushed aside a question from a foreign reporter on whether Gore and he had settled their differences saying: "I don't know of any differences. I'm not aware. Was there any?"