

Korean peninsula crisis will destabilise region, says Dr M
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NEW DELHI – Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad warned that "provoking" North Korea will only stoke regional tensions as the crisis in the Korean peninsula has swelled to a "worrying" stage.

The sensitive peninsula was embroiled in turmoil after North Korea's artillery attack on a South Korean village in late November -- triggering fears of military conflict between both hostile neighbours -- as international peacemakers jostled to douse the simmering tensions.

Four were reported killed in South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island in the firing incident.

"Deliberately provoking North Korea is definitely a wrong move. When you react to force with force, you increase the tension and you never know when this will lead to warfare," Dr Mahathir told Bernama in Delhi.

A staunch western critic but well-admired Asian statesman, Dr Mahathir blamed American interference for the peninsula's political quagmire, with both militaries still technically at war since the end of the 1950-1953 Korean War.

While many western critics blamed Pyongyang for the current military mess in the volatile region, some say North Korean leaders were riled up after South Korea and its American ally conducted joint military drill, close to north's coastline.

"When you carry out military exercise at the border of a country (North Korea), especially at the seacoast, the country will feel threatened.

"(This) situation will lead to instability, its worrying. Many of the people in the south are actually from the north, they have relatives in the north. I don't think they want to see their relatives killed in a war.

"I think they would like to have some kind of peaceful settlement of the dispute, what ever it may be," said Dr Mahathir in a Bernama report..

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife Dr Siti Hasmah, is currently on a private visit to India.