

'We don't want to take sides'

PM: For the sake of peace, scale down military drills

VLADIVOSTOK: Malaysia does not feel threatened by the United States and their plans to deploy missiles in the Asia-Pacific region or by Chinese warships there, but it is worried about potential accidents, Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad told Sputnik news agency in an interview.

In August, US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper said he would like to deploy medium-range missiles in Asia, adding, however, that this could take a long time.

"I don't think any official offer has been made but this is something that we gather from the news.

"And we think that if we have to spend money on defence, it must really be on something that is useful for us to maintain our security.

"At the moment, Malaysia does not feel threatened. Yes, there are Chinese warships in the South China Sea and Americans have also come there, but we don't see that as a threat directly against Malaysia," Dr Mahathir said when asked how the potential deployment of US missiles could impact the situation in the region.

"But the possibility of accidents happening is what worries us. If accidents happen and lead to some fighting, we are not going to be involved. We don't want to take sides with anyone."

The Prime Minister is currently in Vladivostok, Russia, for the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF), which ends today.

Dr Mahathir and Russian President Vladimir Putin held a



Strengthening ties: Putin shaking hands with Dr Mahathir during their meeting at the EEF in Vladivostok. — AFP

bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the EEF in which both leaders discussed efforts to further strengthen ties between the two countries.

During the 30 minutes discussion in the port city overlooking Golden Horn Bay, near the borders with China and North Korea, they also spoke about trade and innovation.

Dr Mahathir said he did not like military drills in the country's waters, qualifying them as provocative and stressing the need to scale down exercises for the sake of global peace.

"On the whole, we are not very

keen on (such) exercises. They are usually very provocative.

"We have recently participated (in the joint exercise) with the Asean group, with the United States, but I have made my views known about this.

"I don't like military drills in our waters because it tends to provoke other countries. I think we should scale down military activities if you want to have peace," said Dr Mahathir when asked whether the country had plans to hold any new joint drills.

The Prime Minister previously

slammed the Asean-US Maritime Exercise, which started on Sept 2, as meaningless, expressing concern that it could make China feel threatened and therefore boost its naval forces.

He also said that the United States should hold such drills in its own territory.

On another subject, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was wary of spending too much money on replacing old Russian Su and MiG fighter planes with newer models but it was looking into the possibility of getting new aircraft from Russia.

"We may find that they (jets that are currently used by Malaysia) are too old and may not be performing just as well as the new versions.

But, on the other hand, money is of great concern to us. Spending money on expensive fighter planes is not very productive for us.

"We are not going to war with anyone," the Prime Minister said when asked if Malaysia was interested to replace the old Russian planes it had with Su-35 or Su-57.

"These are very expensive toys," he said of the latest models.

However, Malaysia has to keep the level of technology in its defence forces up to date, Dr Mahathir said.

"We are looking into the possibility of getting new planes from Russia, and we are also looking at other planes," he said. — Bernama

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