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MAHATHIR SAYS CHINA'S READINESS TO DISCUSS SPRATLY ISSUE A GOOD MOVE

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ALOR SETAR, July 25<sup>92</sup> (Bernama) -- China's readiness to hold talks to resolve the overlapping claims to the Spratlys is a good development, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

+I thank China's leaders for taking into account the views of Asean countries,+ he said.

+We are aware that now the United States no longer has a base in Southeast Asia because they had to withdraw their armada from the region.+

+If they had left the region and we quarrel among ourselves and this firstly will show that we are not efficient in managing relations among ourselves in East Asia and secondly it will cause the United States to return to become the policeman because we here do not know how to safeguard peace in our region++ he said.

He said countries in the region should prove to the world that people in East Asia were also capable of safeguarding peace in the east without outside interference. -- more

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+If we give reasons as to why they should return here with their military, this will then place us under their power,+ he told reporters at the airport here.

Dr Mahathir said with China's readiness to negotiate, he was confident that the claims to the Spratlys would be resolved without any conflict or war and this would bring good to all.

+I believe that with China's willingness to resolve the problem through negotiations, other countries should take this as a model.+

+Any claims to any area should be resolved through negotiations based on legal factors and if we are willing to abide by the law, I think there will be no problems,+ he added.

He said Malaysia did not harbour any doubts over China's sincerity in wanting to resolve the problem. -- more

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+We should accept it at face value.+

Malaysia should accept what was now clear that is they were not only willing to resolve the Spratly problem but were also willing to jointly exploit the area.

On the Khmer Rouge's reluctance to abide by the Paris Peace Accord, Dr Mahathir said the Khmer Rouge should realise that its tough approach would result in an equally tough response.

+I think if the Khmer Rouge continues to use force, it will be difficult for us to avoid using tough measures. I think they will stand to lose and the United Nations will also lose. As such I think they should accept what they had agreed to,+ the Prime Minister added. -- Bernama

▼25/07/21-01MST