

Pact on resolving Sipadan-Ligatan claims

**From
Zainon Ahmad**

JAKARTA, Sat — Malaysia and Indonesia have agreed to continue their bilateral efforts to find a solution to the Sipadan-Ligatan issue in the greater interest of growing economic and trade ties between the two countries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad

said in view of the close traditional ties and growing two-way investments crossing the Straits of Malacca, the two countries have decided to continue to seek a bilateral solution to the problem.

The third meeting of the Malaysian-Indonesian Joint Working Group (JWG) reached a deadlock over the issue early this month and Malaysia proposed that the dispute be referred to the

International Court of Justice (ICJ). Indonesia was opposed to the idea.

"We may not have set a time limit for the bilateral efforts but we have certainly not set aside recourse to the ICJ should a bilateral solution elude us," he told a Press conference at the end of his two-day visit.

Sipadan and Ligatan are two islands off the east coast of Sabah which Indonesia wants, claiming that

they are in an area it claims to be within its jurisdiction.

Malaysia has argued that it had been effectively administering the islands since the last century, when Sabah was ruled by the Chartered Company and later as British North Borneo.

The two countries have documents to support their ownership claims.

Dr Mahathir also said the two countries agreed that besides the ICJ, arbitration

by other tribunals may also be considered to resolve the nagging issue.

On this issue, he said the media should exercise restraint and not resort to presenting the problem in a manner which may cause people to become emotional.

"Sensationalising the problem in the media will not help the two countries to solve the problem but hinder them in their negotiations," he said.