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Malaysia to seek Asean's views over China's proposal

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Malaysia will seek Asean's views on China's proposal for joint development of the disputed Spratly Islands at the grouping's informal summit in December.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad informed the Sultan of Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah that Malaysia had not taken a stand in response to China's position as it viewed as important Asean's and Asean countries' role in the issue.

"The Prime Minister said it would be better if the matter was brought up at the coming Asean meeting to get the views and stands of Asean member countries," Abdullah said.

He was briefing reporters after a delegation meeting between Brunei and Malaysia led by Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and Dr Mahathir.

"The Prime Minister took the opportunity to tell the Sultan of Brunei of China's stand on the Spratly Islands. The Prime Minister said Malaysia had not made a stand as a response to China's stand but views Asean and other Asean claimant countries as having played an important role in the issue and so it would be better if the matter was brought up at the coming Asean meeting to get the views and stands of Asean nations involved in the claims," Abdullah said.

He said that China, through its Prime Minister Li Peng who visited Malaysia last month, had acknowledged that there were overlapping claims to the islands and that their resolution was not an easy matter but should be resolved peacefully through reference to international laws and the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea.

He said Li Peng's view was that presently China and other claimant countries involved had other priorities, especially those related to development and economic reformation and these should be given attention now as they were urgent while the Spratlys claims continued to be discussed as usual.

China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand and Brunei have laid claim on part or the entire string of atolls and coral reefs in the South China Sea, believed to be rich in oil and other resources.

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