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Abdullah: Issue can be resolved through bilateral discussions

MALAYSIA has rejected Singapore's proposal to resolve the 1990 Point of Agreement (POA) between the two nations on the issue of the Malayan Railway land to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the POA, relating to the development and status of the Malayan Railway land in Tanjong Pagar, Singapore, is just an "agreement".

"This is not a problem of treaties ... In fact, a POA is similar to a memorandum of understanding.

"It is of our opinion that it is better to discuss the matter since there may be other matters which may be related to it. We can solve it through bilateral discussions as that will be the best," Abdullah told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday after launching the Malaysian-Morocco Friendship Association.

The Singapore Government on Wednesday proposed that the matter be referred for arbitration since there is a disagreement over the correct interpretation of the POA.

Alternatively, if arbitration is not considered suitable, then the matter could be submitted to the ICJ.

"I believe that if we sincerely discuss and our intentions are to further enhance bilateral ties between Singapore and Malaysia, a solution can be found. There has to be a comprehensive approach to solve the problems that is being faced," he said.

"There are many issues between Malaysia and Singapore. It is not just one or two," Abdullah added.

Malaysian officials are currently in Singapore to discuss the issue of relocation of Malaysia's rail Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) operations from Tanjong Pagar to its own territory.

The two issues are of separate concern.

He cited the dispute between Malaysia and Singapore on the overlapping claims over Pulau Batu Puteh which was brought to the ICJ in the Hague, Netherlands.

"In that case, both parties decided to bring the matter up to ICJ and the procurement for the case to ICJ has been agreed upon. Procurement is a document which draws the details of the matter being disputed," he said.

Both sides have agreed to include two other features, Middle Rocks and South Ledge, located near Pulau Batu Puteh in the subject for the adjudication by the ICJ.

Negotiations over the islet off Johor, otherwise called Pedra Branca by Singapore, have been protacted over the past two years but were reinstated following talks between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Singapore counterpart Goh Chok Tong during the latter's visit in February.

Meanwhile, when asked if he is happy with bilateral ties with Singapore, Abdullah questioned: "You do not feel happy?"

"I am not unhappy but I am aware that there are many problems and at times, I feel that we should not be raising issues which are that sensitive especially at times which we should be concentrating on some other aspect of our bilateral relations.

"Perhaps it is time that we look more into what we can do to help in bringing about the economic recovery," Abdullah said.

He added that there is a certain strong linkage between the economies of

Malaysia and Singapore and anything that affects Malaysia will affect them as well, and vice versa.

When asked how a conflict can arise between neighbours, Abdullah quipped: "Neighbours, brothers, sisters, husbands and wives ... these things happen. The question is whether the relationship will endure."

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