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Mahathir-Spratlys

MALAYSIA DOESN'T WANT U.S. TO INTERFERE IN SPRATLY ISLAND DISPUTE

ALOR SETAR, Jan 15 -- Malaysia does not want the United States to interfere in the claim by several Asian countries over the Spratly Islands, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today.

He said the dispute should be resolved by the countries having claim to the group of islands.

"There is no need for the United States to interfere in the matter. We can resolve it among ourselves," he told reporters after opening Kompleks Islam Al Bukhary, here today.

He was asked to comment on a news report which said that the U.S. had offered to help resolve the dispute by sponsoring a meeting among the countries involved.

The Spratlys straddle vital sea lanes in the South China Sea and are believed to be sitting atop rich deposits of oil and natural gas. They are claimed in whole or in part by China, Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei.

The Philippines has recently sought international support to halt what it sees as Chinese expansion in the Spratlys.

Asked about the proposal by the Philippines for a meeting of the nations laying claim to the islands, Dr Mahathir said it was up to Manila but Malaysia was firm in its stand that outsiders should not meddle in the matter.

Reporters also asked the Prime Minister about foreign media reports that Malaysia did not have enough funds to finance its economic growth.

The foreign media, he replied, was jealous of the country because it did not beg for assistance to restore its economy and Malaysians were able to live comfortably.

"They want us to go on a bended knee begging for help which would enable them to easily muzzle us," he said.

"They (foreign media) can say what they want, but is there poverty among our people. We can survive, the people live comfortably and business is good.

"We succeeded in selling 42,000 units of houses worth RM3.8 billion in just one month (under the Home Ownership Campaign). I would like to ask which other place can attain such an achievement including the countries from where these (foreign journalists) are from," he said.

On a newspaper report today that an independent commission would be set up to investigate the police assault on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Dr Mahathir said he did not know anything about it and the government had yet to make any decision on the matter.

The report, quoting sources, said Dr Mahathir or Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi would announce the commission's formation soon.

Politicians and non-governmental organisations had called for the setting up of the commission after Attorney-General Tan Sri Mohtar Abdullah confirmed that police were responsible for some of the injuries Anwar sustained while in detention under the Internal Security Act.

-- BERNAMA

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