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`No need for middleman to resolve Spratly issue'

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ALOR STAR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there was no need for any middleman to resolve the overlapping claims on the Spratly islands.

Asked on the proposal by the United States to become the "middleman" to resolve the problem, Dr Mahathir said: "There's no need ... we will settle the problems among ourselves".

Asked what if the Philippines decided to accept the US offer, Dr Mahathir said if the Philippines sought their help, it was their affair.

"We don't want other people to interfere," he added.

Philippines Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado, who returned from the US recently, had said the Philippines supported the idea which was forwarded by US Defence Secretary William Cohen.

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 Prime Minister was replying to queries from reporters after performing the ground-breaking ceremony of the RM70 million Kompleks Islam Al-Bukhary at Jalan Langgar.

Dr Mahathir also said the Government had not decided on the formation of an independent inquiry to investigate the alleged police assault on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Last week Dr Mahathir had said that the Government would consider suggestions by several quarters for the setting up of an independent inquiry to investigate the alleged police assault on the former Deputy Prime Minister.

Asked to comment on allegations by the foreign Press that Malaysia did not have enough funds to revive the country's economy, Dr Mahathir said they were envious of the country's success.

"They can say whatever they like ... but if we look around, do we see poverty?"

"They envy and hate us because we do not ask them for help ... they are hoping that we crawl and beg for their help so that they can pressure us.

"We are not going to ask them for help ... we are leading a perfect life and business is running well.

"I would like to ask where can we find a place that can sell 14,000 houses worth RM3.8 billion?" he said, referring to the successful Home Ownership campaign which ended on Tuesday.

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