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PM: Spratly islands facilities are within our EEZ

LANGKAWI, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today defended the building of research facilities on two reefs outside the disputed Spratly islands, saying the construction took place in the Malaysian Exclusive Economic zone.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had the right to build the facilities on the Siput and Peninjau reefs.

Commenting on the diplomatic protest by the Philippines over the building of the facilities on the reefs, which are also being claimed by that country, he said:

"We carried out the work for scientific studies on fisheries and the deep sea within our zone and not beyond it.

"Malaysia has the right to put up the structures for its own interests as we want to know the situation, including the climatic conditions there."

Asked whether the structures were being built for future exploitation of minerals, Dr Mahathir said this was not so.

He said as the surrounding waters were some 606 metres deep the anchors of ships could not reach the seabed.

"The ships can only berth in the lagoons of the reefs and that is why we decided to put up the facilities."

The Prime Minister said if Malaysia did not put up the structures, others would do so.

"Already others have taken over areas within our zone like the Commodore Reef which is occupied by the Philippines and we do not question this.

"It is the same with Amboyna Cay and 'Terumbu Perahu' which are occupied by Vietnam. We have never questioned this and others should also not question what we do on our islands," he said after launching the "Make It Langkawi" joint marketing programme and Langkawi Travel Mart organised by Malaysia Airlines and the Langkawi Development Authority.

On whether the issue could cause diplomatic tension, Dr Mahathir said he did not foresee such a situation unless the Philippines took aggressive action.

He added that by right Malaysia should have questioned the occupation of Commodore Reef by the Philippines a long time ago.

"But, we never questioned this and their earlier claims to Sabah."

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