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Mahathir-Spratlys

STRUCTURE IS ON MALAYSIAN TERRITORY- DR MAHATHIR

LANGKAWI, June 27 (Bernama) -- The reefs and shoals on which Malaysia has erected structures in the South China Sea belong to Malaysia and not the Philippines, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Peninjau and Siput reefs were within Malaysia's Exclusive Economic Zone and hence the country did not encroach into the territory of other nations, he said when launching the "Langkawi Travel Mart" programme here.

Hence the countries involved in the claim to the Spratlys should respect Malaysia's right to erect whatever structure it thought fit on its own territory, Dr Mahathir said.

"We have built on our own zone and not outside of the zone for climatic, research and marine life studies and also to prevent ship collisions," he said.

The Prime Minister said this when commenting on reports that the Philippines proposed to build similar structures on uninhabited reefs and shoals of the Spratlys in response to the move by Malaysia and China.

Replying to a question from reporters, Dr Mahathir felt the issue would not bring about any tension in relations between Malaysia and the Philippines.

"I do not see why this should happen. If the Philippines resorts to aggressive action it will lead to tension but we find that they will not resort to this (action that will lead to tension)."

He said Malaysia should have long ago claimed another reef, the Terumbu Laksamana, "but we did not do that whereas the Philippines is still retaining its claim to Sabah."

"In that also we were willing to negotiate in the interest of safeguarding the good relations with them. Hence we hope they will not raise matters that are likely to cause tension in relations," he said.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia preferred to resolve any problem through negotiations.

"The Spratlys issue should be resolved as a multilateral problem as this had been agreed to at Asean meetings."

Malaysia would not propose a meeting of the parties involved to resolve the claim but would attend any meeting held at the initiative of other countries, he said.

The Prime Minister stressed that the erecting of the structure was not based on gas and oil resources of the islands.

He said Malaysia built the structures as it feared other countries would resort to doing this as had already happened on several other reefs in the past.

The Philippines had occupied Terumbu Laksamana and Vietnam had a presence on Terumbu Perahu and Terumbu Amboyna Cay but Malaysia had never questioned them, Dr Mahathir said.

Referring to the millennium bug, Dr Mahathir said many countries had decided to shutdown certain essential sectors such as banks and airlines as a precaution despite being Y2K-compliant.

This was part of their safeguard measures, he said when responding to a recent news report that banks were likely to declare a four-day holiday from Dec 31 as an insurance against the Y2K bug.

Dr Mahathir said certain countries had also similarly decided to stop airline flights for a certain period.

The Prime Minister said he had not heard anything from Malaysia

Airlines yet.

Last week it was reported that certain consultants had warned that even computer systems which had become Y2K compliant might suffer glitches.

It was also reported that a National Contingency Plan had been prepared by the Federal Government to serve as a backup for critical sectors such as energy, oil, telecommunications, gas, transport, banking and government administration.

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