

PM: ASSURE US

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Shipping lane must not be affected, S'pore told

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SIK: Malaysia wants an assurance from the Singapore Government that its current reclamation work on the south-eastern part of Pulau Tekong will not adversely affect the deep water line used as a shipping route, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister said although the reclamation work was being carried out in Singapore territory, it might have an effect on the depth of the deep water line which is

also the border separating the two countries.

"As such, it will have bad effects on our shipping. That is why we are of the opinion that Singapore should consider this factor and give us an assurance that the reclamation will not affect the deep water line," Dr Mahathir told reporters after a gathering with the people here.

He said Wisma Putra would follow up with his request to get such an assurance.

He said the Government had also called the Singapore High Commissioner to regis-

ter its displeasure over the matter.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had yet to get a response from the republic on the matter.

He said Malaysia also wanted to ensure that the deep water line would not move due to the reclamation on the Singapore side.

Asked if the matter would be taken to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), he said: "We have not reached that stage. We still have a pending case (in the ICJ) on the claim on Pulau Batu Putih."

In KUALA LUMPUR, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri

Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia and Singapore should stop the debate over the issue and instead hold talks as it affects the livelihood, ecology and environment of both countries.

"We share common borders and it is a universal bilateral practice between countries to discuss these matters to achieve a common understanding," he said.

Syed Hamid said the land reclamation works would affect the movement of ships to Malaysian ports and the water levels and these issues should be taken into consideration.

"These issues are not contentious but it would be good to achieve mutuality between the two countries as we want to move forward in our relationship with Singapore.

"What you do on your territory should not be the issue, but it should not affect your neighbours," he told reporters after attending the Third Meeting of the Joint Commission between Malaysia and Vietnam at the Sheraton Imperial hotel here.

He also said treaties had been signed since 1927 by the two countries to address vari-

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ous issues including border issues. In 1979, another treaty was signed to address these matters, which included determining maritime borders and methods used.

"In 1995, these two treaties were rectified to suit the two countries," he said, adding that there was a time when Singapore had disputed the border co-ordinates set by Malaysia.

He said when the disputes arose, they were resolved quickly to avoid misunderstandings and this should be applied to the current land reclamation issue.

On another matter, Syed Hamid said Vietnamese workers should not be discriminated against as all foreign workers coming to Malaysia were subjected to the same laws and regulations.

He was asked whether there should be tighter security measures for the Vietnamese as there had been unpleasant incidents in the past caused by "boat people."

"In the past, the boat people left their country under very different circumstances, but now Vietnam is a stable country with a developing economy, so those who want to come here are actually keen to work in our country," he said.

"We do not want to place extra burden on them by imposing stringent measures when they come here to work."