

Reclamation work to go on, says Singapore Minister

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SINGAPORE, Wed. -- Singapore will continue to carry out land reclamation despite complaints from Malaysia that such work at the narrow Straits of Johor separating the two countries will disrupt shipping access and the environment.

National Development Minister Mah Bow Tan, in a parliamentary speech released today, repeated Singapore's stand that the reclamation was within its territory.

"To meet the increasing demand for land, MND (Ministry of National Development) will also continue our land reclamation programme from our territorial waters," he said.

Singapore has increased its land size by 11 per cent through land reclamation over the past 40 years, from 582 sq km in 1960 to 647.5 sq km currently.

But recent work at Singapore's north-eastern Pulau Tekong, and in Tuas, west of the main island, have irked Malaysia which has voiced concern over access to its southern ports in Pasir Gudang and Tanjung Pelepas, the latter seen as a growing rival to Singapore's ports.

Malaysia also said the reclamation had narrowed the waters between a Malaysian naval training base

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'Singapore agreed to look into matter'

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in Tanjung Pengelih in Johor and the reclaimed area in Pulau Tekong to 700 metres.

On March 14, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said that Singapore, which initially rejected Malaysia's claims that the reclamation work in the republic's waters off Pulau Tekong will pose problems to Malaysia, had agreed to look into the matter.

"Singapore initially rejected our claims that there were problems but now has agreed to look into the issue after we submitted our protests," the Prime Minister had said.

He said this when asked to comment on whether visiting Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had given any commitment on resolving the issue when they met on March 11.

The issue had surfaced during Lee's visit where he had asked Kuala Lumpur to send a note on its concerns.

Yesterday, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Singapore was more interested in safeguarding its interests instead of considering the effects on others.

He said that while Singapore viewed activities within its territory as a sovereign right, Malaysia wanted to know if the impact of the reclamation would affect Malaysia's own.