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`Stop all work on Batu Putih'

Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Barisan Nasional Youth wants Singapore to stop all construction work being carried out on Pulau Batu Putih, off Johor.

Its deputy head, Datuk Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzir said Singapore had no authority to conduct the works as the island was being disputed by Malaysia and Singapore.

"The island does not belong to Singapore and they have to respect Malaysia and honour the Asean spirit. And thus, they should immediately cease all forms of work conducted on the island.

"We also demand all Singaporean personnel to leave the island until a decision on the ownership is made by the International Court of Justice."

Abdul Aziz, who is Umno Youth deputy chief, said this to reporters after leading a group of 50 BN Youth members to present the memorandum to the Singapore High Commission at its office near here.

He and four other BN Youth leaders had a 20-minute meeting with the commission's First Secretary Mark Neo to whom they handed the memorandum.

The others were Umno Youth treasurer Wan Khairil Anuar Wan Ahmad, its international bureau head Dr Shamsul Anwar Sulaiman, MCA Youth secretary-general Liow Tiong Lai and Gerakan Youth international bureau head Lau Yeng Peng.

It was reported on Sunday that Singapore was carrying out construction work on Pulau Batu Putih to build a two-storey complex and helicopter landing terminal.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that Singapore had gone beyond norms by carrying out construction and development work on the island when the ownership is in dispute.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said last week that Malaysia would bring the dispute to the ICJ after Singapore set a date for both parties to sign an agreement to enable the ICJ to look into it.

Pulau Batu Putih, a small rocky out-crop located about 15 nautical miles off Penggerang, Johor, is also being claimed by Singapore which calls it Pedro Branca.

The decision to bring the dispute to the ICJ was reached at a meeting between Dr Mahathir and his Singapore counterpart Dr Goh Chok Tong in Langkawi in September last year.

Singapore first showed its intention to stake a claim to the island in 1989 when it stopped Malaysian fishermen from fishing near the island. The special agreement is the first step to begin the legal process at the ICJ, which is the judicial arm of the United Nations.