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Singapore discussing dates to sign special agreement with Malaysia over

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Singaporean Foreign Ministry officials are discussing dates for Singapore and Malaysia to sign the special agreement to refer their dispute over Pulau Batu Puteh to the International Court of Justice, the republic's Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar said.

Jayakumar, responding to allegations that Singapore was delaying signing the agreement, said Singapore was ready to sign it at any time and was trying to find an opportunity for Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and himself.

"We are looking at January. I believe there's one meeting in January when Syed Hamid and I will attend; perhaps we can sign then," he said in a statement faxed by the Singapore High Commission.

Malaysia and Singapore are locked in a dispute over ownership of Pulau Batu Puteh, or what Singapore calls Pedra Branca.

"It is absurd to say that Singapore is deliberately delaying the signing of the special agreement to refer Malaysia's claim over Pedra Branca to the ICJ."

He added that Singapore had first proposed to resolve Malaysia's claim to Pedra Branca through the ICJ in 1989.

"Why did we do that even though we had been exercising sovereignty over Pedra Branca for more than 150 years? Because we wanted to resolve Malaysia's claim peacefully, without adverse effects on our bilateral relations; we are ready to kick off the next stage in the ICJ process by signing the special agreement."

"Prime Minister (Datuk Seri) Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said that Malaysia would respect international law on territorial disputes and avoid any confrontation with Singapore over Pedra Branca. That is Singapore's position also."