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Mahathir-Batu Puteh

BEST JUDGE FOR BATU PUTEH ISSUE IS NON-PARTISAN PARTY, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 28 (Bernama) -- The best judge to decide who has sovereign right over Pulau Batu Puteh will be a non-partisan party and for this reason, Malaysia has insisted that the case be referred to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) soonest, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We hope we can bring it to ICJ very soon. We believe that the best people to judge are people who are not directly involved.

"Partisans cannot pass judgement," the Prime Minister told a news conference here after a briefing on Malaysia's preparations to host the XIII Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit.

The summit is scheduled to be held at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here from Feb 15 to 28.

Dr Mahathir reiterated the government's stand that the rocky outcrop 15 nautical miles off Pengerang in Johor belonged to Malaysia.

"But I am sure they would dispute us. They can take it (their claim) to ICJ...it is up to a third party to judge," he said.

The Prime Minister said as far as Malaysia was concerned there should not be any delay in referring the dispute to ICJ as both countries had failed to resolve the dispute through diplomatic channels.

"As far as we are concerned there should not be any delay. We are prepared and Singapore, being an efficient country, I am quite sure they have been prepared for a long time," he said.

Meanwhile Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia had proposed three dates for both countries to sign a special agreement to pave the way for the dispute to be referred to ICJ.

However, until now Singapore had not indicated whether they agreed or disagreed to the dates suggested.

"We have given several dates but so far they have not chosen the date. So, we need to meet to discuss the date to sign the special accord which can be done either in Malaysia or Singapore," he said.

On the incident where a group of Malaysian journalists and Marine Police were told to leave as they were approaching Pulau Batu Puteh recently, Syed Hamid did not rule out the possibility that Malaysia would send a protest.

He said until a decision was made by the ICJ, Malaysia considered Pulau Batu Puteh to be within its territory and it was not proper for Singapore authorities to prevent Malaysians, including the Marine Police, from approaching the island.

--BERNAMA

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