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Dr M relieved issue over islands solved

PETALING JAYA, Tues. - Expressing relief that the Sipadan and Ligitan issue has been solved, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the International Court of Justice's decision favouring Malaysia should not be a thorn in relations between Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta.

The Prime Minister said the issue should be put to rest following the ICJ verdict.

"We are very happy (with the decision) although from the start we were of the view that the islands belong to us.

"However, when we decided to refer the case to the ICJ, we could not convince ourselves that the decision would be in our favour, but now that it is solved, we are grateful. I hope there will not be any further claims after this."

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang on his return from an official visit to Japan.

Asked if the ICJ's decision would have any implications on bilateral relations with Indonesia, Dr Mahathir said it should not be the case.

"I don't think there would be any implications on our bilateral relations because both (Malaysia and Indonesia) have agreed to accept whatever decision made when we agreed to refer the case to ICJ.

"It (the decision) could have been against us. Even if it did not favour us we would have still accepted the decision."

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi expressed confidence that Malaysia-Indonesia relations would continue to gain strength in the future interests of both nations.

"We not only want to maintain the present level of relationship, but wish to make it even stronger," he said."

Abdullah said Malaysia had considered the two islands as its own but in the spirit of Asean had agreed to bring the ownership question to the ICJ.