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Mahathir-Singapore

M'SIA WILL NOT DEPLOY WARSHIPS OFF PULAU BATU PUTEH, SAYS PM

PUTRAJAYA, Dec 26 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia will not deploy its security forces and warships in the vicinity of Pulau Batu Puteh, a small rocky outcrop located 15 nautical miles off Pengerang in Johor.

"We wish to avoid a confrontation. We're not about to wage war with anyone...we're not giving in, but we're not looking for a reason to engage in battle," he told reporters after attending an Aidilfitri gathering hosted by the Prime Minister's Department here.

He was asked to comment on the call by Barisan Nasional (BN) Youth chairman Datuk Hishamuddin Tun Hussein yesterday for the government to consider deploying the military and warships in the waters off Pulau Batu Puteh where Singapore has carried out construction and development work when ownership of the island is in dispute.

Malaysia and Singapore are locked in a territorial dispute over the island and both sides have agreed to bring the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Asked on the action to be taken by Malaysia in the event that Singapore refuses to ratify the agreement to pave way for the dispute to be brought to the ICJ, Dr Mahathir said: "We'll think about it when the time comes."

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that Kuala Lumpur had been ready with the necessary documents for arbitration since 1998 when Malaysia and Singapore agreed in principle to refer the dispute to the ICJ but Singapore had yet to come up with the necessary documentation to support its claim.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the fund-raising campaign conducted by PAS purportedly to save the Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR), religious schools mostly run by the state governments, following a proposal to absorb them into the national school system. A sum of RM100,000 was reported to have been collected over the last three weeks.

Dr Mahathir said that the government had no right to intervene if the funds were being collected from among PAS members.

"However, if they were to make a public collection without any permit, that's an offence," he said.

Yesterday, Deputy Information Minister Datuk Zainudin Maidin reminded the people not to be deceived by such efforts by PAS.

Zainuddin has said that the campaign was a political move and the money collected could be used for political activities.

Commenting on the report of the Public Complaints Bureau in the Prime Minister's Department on red tape at state Land Offices, Dr Mahathir said that the government had begun to identify weaknesses contributing to the delay in the approval of land titles.

"We'll study, we'll examine...we've already embark on such efforts," he said.

According to the bureau's report, the number of complaints against Land Offices was the second highest received from the public against government agencies. The complaints include delay in approval and issuance of titles.

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