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Najib: Well-prepared strategy to stake claim

Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Malaysia has a well-prepared strategy to ensure it will be given the rights over Pulau Batu Puteh when the dispute is taken to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, however, refused to disclose the strategy, saying that it could not be made public.

"I am not in a position to reveal much details on our strategy except to say that it does not involve any military action. This dispute with Singapore over the island can be settled amicably between both countries," Najib, who is Umno vice-president, told reporters when met at a Hari Raya open house organised by Bukit Bintang Umno Youth division.

He said that Malaysia had, through Wisma Putra, frequently protested Singapore's move to treat Pulau Batu Puteh as its own when the ICJ had yet to make any decision on the rightful owner of the island.

"The republic should not place their navy patrol and coast guard vessels on Pulau Batu Puteh and chase away our fishermen from the island.

"Their action shows they do not respect the fact that the island is under dispute between both countries and only the ICJ can make a decision on the rightful owner."

He was commenting on an incident yesterday when a Singapore naval vessel chased a Malaysian Marine Police boat with journalists on board, about four nautical miles from Pulau Batu Puteh.

Najib said Singapore ought to realise that Pulau Batu Puteh was not under their jurisdiction and that they could not act as they wished on matters concerning the island.

"We will continue to protest any move carried out by Singapore indicating they have a right over the island."

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

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

Meanwhile, Barisan Nasional Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said the movement would not compromise on its action to protest against Singapore's move to carry out construction work on Pulau Batu Puteh.

"Our action to submit a protest note to the Singapore High Commission yesterday was to formally register our unhappiness over Singapore's move.

"If they still continue with the work, we will consider other forms of action against them," said Hishammuddin, who is also the Youth and Sports Minister.

The Umno Youth head further said that Singapore's move to carry out actions which were in conflict to the decision to leave the matter to ICJ, made the republic different from other neighbouring countries.

"For instance, when Malaysia and Indonesia decided to bring up the dispute over Pulau Sipadan and Ligitan to ICJ, Indonesia refrained from doing anything that could jeopardise the relationship between both countries."