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No confrontation, says PM (HL)

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PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - Malaysia will not follow Singapore's example by deploying armed forces personnel and warships to keep watch over Pulau Batu Puteh as such an action would lead to confrontation with the island republic, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said that Kuala Lumpur respected international law on territorial disputes and would act accordingly, to present its claim over Pulau Batu Puteh.

"We have to avoid confrontation, we have no intention of going to war with anyone," Dr Mahathir said when asked if Malaysia would follow Singapore's aggressive behaviour by deploying the Royal Malaysian Navy's patrol vessels to the island.

Asked if Malaysia was giving in to Singapore by not reacting in a similar manner, Dr Mahathir said that Kuala Lumpur preferred to handle the matter professionally in conformity with international norms.

"We are not giving in, we just do not want to create a reason for war with anyone," he stressed.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after attending his department's Hari Raya gathering today.

Present were the Prime Minister's wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Samsudin Osman and Public Service Department director-general Tan Sri Jamaluddin Damanhuri.

On claims by Singapore that it had the proof to support its claim over the island, Dr Mahathir said the republic should submit all relevant points to the International Court of Justice.

On what Malaysia would do next if Singapore continued to delay and refused to refer the dispute to the ICJ, Dr Mahathir said "we will cross the bridge when we get there".

Asked about the free movement of Singaporeans in Pulau Pisang, also in Johor waters, he said Malaysia had given them permission to operate and maintain a lighthouse on the island.

On the domestic front, Dr Mahathir warned that action would be taken against any group or individual who solicited funds from the public without approval.

He was responding to a question on the actions of certain individuals (believed to be members of an Opposition party) soliciting funds from the public on the pretext of funding People's Religious Schools.

"If they are only collecting from their members then we cannot do anything but if they are soliciting funds from the public without licence, then it's against the law ...we will take action," Dr Mahathir said.

On claims that such funds were actually being channelled to the Opposition party's election coffers, he said these were just claims without proof.

"I don't know and I do not want to accuse anyone," he said.

On the delay in land applications due to bureaucracy at land offices nationwide, Dr Mahathir said that the matter was under review to improve the process.