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Singapore: Send protest note if reclamation work affects deep water line

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Singapore has asked Malaysia to send a formal protest note if it feels that the land reclamation activities in the republic's waters bordering Johor have affected the deep water line, making it difficult for ships to call at the Pasir Gudang port.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today the republic was prepared to look into the matter if there was evidence that its land reclamation activities had affected the ecology or the deep water line bordering both countries.

Abdullah was speaking at a Press conference at his office after a one-hour meeting with visiting Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

"He (Lee) repeatedly said that first, it's Singapore's right to undertake the reclamation, second, it's done within its territorial water and third, it would not affect the ecology and deep water channel.

"He did not believe that it would affect us in the ways that we claimed it to be."

Lee, who is in Malaysia for a three-day visit, is accompanied by Members of Parliament Zainudin Nordin, Cedric Foo and Lim Hwee Hua, and officials from the republic's Foreign Affairs Ministry.

He had earlier visited Putrajaya Holdings Sdn Bhd where he was briefed by Putrajaya Corporation president Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin and its town planning director Jebasingam Issace John.

Abdullah said Malaysia on its part had taken the initiative to start a survey in the area to find out for sure the real effects of the land reclamation activities "on the Singaporean side".

"That's the best thing to do ...

"Many issues can affect or need not affect bilateral relations depending on how we handle the issues.

"At the moment, I don't believe that it can sour our bilateral relations although there are concerns on both sides based on what is happening at the moment.

"Lee wouldn't be here for a visit if that's the case. On both sides of the Causeway, I'm sure Malaysians and Singaporeans would like to see our bilateral ties remain good."

Speaking later, Lee stressed that such was the best solution as the republic believed that the reclamation activities were carried out "within our territorial waters and within our rights".

"If there is any problem, raise the matter with us and we'll consider them," he said after a meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah at Putra Perdana.

Lee also said that it was important for both countries to maintain the personal ties between them by continuing to exchange views and discuss problems.

"These problems will arise from time to time and if played up by the Press, will become a big issue and more difficult to ourselves as both sides have their manoeuvre room restricted."

Last Friday, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would seek an assurance from Singapore that the republic's land reclamation activities in the waters bordering Johor would not affect the deep water line demarcating the boundaries between both countries.

He said the reclamation work could affect the depth of the deep water

line and this would adversely affect shipping.

While he did not think that it was Singapore's intention to jeopardise operations at Johor's Tanjung Pelepas Port, Dr Mahathir said ships that want to enter Pasir Gudang must go through Singapore waters, some of which are deep and which may also be affected by the reclamation works.

Dr Mahathir, however, added that Malaysia had not reach the stage of bringing up the matter with the International Court of Justice as it still has a case with Singapore regarding the claims on Pulau Batu Putih.

In January, Wisma Putra has sent a protest note to Singapore on the reclamation work in the area bordering the maritime boundary between Johor and Singapore.

The note was sent after Malaysia found that in the reclamation process, Singapore had encroached into Malaysian territory and that was verified by Malaysian Government agencies.

On the package of outstanding issues between both countries, Lee said a letter containing new proposals had been written by Dr Mahathir to Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew last week.

"The Senior Minister has replied that the proposals were new and that he needs some time to study them and their implications, which include the new formula on the price of water."

The outstanding issues between Malaysia and Singapore include the sale of water to Singapore, the points of agreement for the development of railway land owned by KTM Bhd, and the status of the Malaysian Customs, Immigration and Quarantine facility at the KTMB station in Tanjung Pagar.
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