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Mahathir-Batu Puteh

PULAU BATU PUTEH IMPORTANT TO MALAYSIA, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 25 (Bernama) -- Although Pulau Batu Puteh does not have natural resources like oil, Malaysia still considers the small rocky outcrop, located 15 nautical miles off Pengerang, Johor, as important because it is situated in Malaysia's territory, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Of course it is important... because it is in our territory.

"We don't take into consideration whether there are sources of oil. Our country is our country... we don't allow people to take any part of our country," the prime minister said when asked how important the island was to Malaysia.

He was speaking to reporters after attending a Christmas reception at the residence of the chairman of the Christian Federation of Malaysia, Rev Datuk Prince Guneratnam, here.

Asked to comment on reports that Singapore coast guard had chased away a Malaysian marine police vessel patrolling near the island, he said that Singapore had adopted the stand that Pulau Batu Puteh belonged to it and that it had the right to control the area.

"That's why they chase away anyone who passes (near the island's waters), be they fishermen or the Malaysian police," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he would leave it to Wisma Putra to decide whether there was a need to submit a protest to the Singapore government on the incident.

On the agreement by both countries to bring the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Dr Mahathir said he regretted that the Singapore government was delaying the process.

He said that although the republic had expressed its agreement to refer the dispute to the ICJ, it had still not prepared the documentation for the ICJ.

He said Malaysia had prepared all the documentation on its claim to the island and it was now up to Singapore to show whether it was sincere in wanting the ICJ to decide on the matter.

"We cannot refer the dispute to the ICJ without receiving consent from Singapore," Dr Mahathir said.

He also said that it was improper for the Singapore government to continue with construction work on the island when its status was still in dispute.

"It is not proper...if there is a dispute, they should not continue to build, they should stop there and wait for the ICJ's decision," he added.

On water supply to Singapore, D Mahathir said that Malaysia would not cut water supply to the republic but the supply now would only be for drinking and bathing purposes.

"We don't feel that we should supply water for their purpose of selling it to ships in order to make more money.

"We know according to the rates they publish that they sell water to ships at at the rate of S\$20 per 1,000 gallons (3,800 litres) of treated water. They buy 1,000 gallons of non-treated water at 3 sen from us.

"Assuming that the cost of treating the water is S\$2, selling it at S\$20, which is RM40, means a huge profit and we don't think that we should contribute to that," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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