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Singapore-Malaysia

RECLAMATION WITHIN OUR RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL LAW, SAYS SINGAPORE

By: Tham Choy Lin

SINGAPORE, March 9 (Bernama) -- Singapore today reiterated that its land reclamation in the Straits of Johor bordering Malaysia is within its own territory and described as "unfounded" Malaysia's claim that it may affect shipping in the area.

In a two-paragraph statement, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said the reclamation was done within Singapore's rights and in accordance to international law.

"At first we were told that we were encroaching on Malaysian territory. After Singapore rebutted this claim, we are now told that our reclamation, which is entirely within our sovereign waters, may affect their shipping. These claims are unfounded in international law.

"Singapore reiterates that the reclamation is carried out entirely within Singapore's territory and all reclamation works are done within our rights and in keeping with international law," said the spokesman.

Over the past week, the reclamation issue has added to a list of bilateral issues between the two countries with Malaysia voicing fears that Singapore's activities may narrow the waterway that separates the two countries and also affect the ecology and livelihood of fishermen in the area.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday it wanted an assurance from Singapore that the reclamation would not affect the deepest point of the straits which was vital for shipping.

Dr Mahathir said he did not think the reclamation off Singapore's Pulau Tekong would affect access to Johor's Pasir Gudang Port.

He said the issue had not reached a stage for it to be referred to the International Court of Justice.

His Singapore counterpart Goh Chok Tong had said he did not understand why the Malaysian media were playing up the issue when the reclamation was done within Singapore's territory.

-- BERNAMA

TCL YBY