

31/12/2002

Settle Pulau Batu Puteh issue in civilised way

Hassan Talib

I HAD never heard of Pulau Batu Puteh until it was reported in the Press. When I read the report, I realised there was a dispute between Malaysia and Singapore over the island's sovereignty.

I thought the island must be big, given all the publicity. However, when I saw a picture of the island, it was just a small stony out-crop. If I had the money I would not pay a single sen to buy it.

At the same time, I wonder why Singapore sent two naval vessels to intimidate our Marine Police boat carrying a group of reporters to see the island.

As a layman, when I see the map, I conclude that the island lies in Malaysian territory. It is much closer to Malaysia than Singapore. Nor is my judgment based on blind nationalism.

Also, I was told about the qualities of a civilised nation. I was told that it would resort to diplomacy, not threat of military force, in resolving international conflict.

If what I heard is correct, Singapore's gunboat diplomacy certainly doesn't qualify it to be a civilised nation though it has a per capita income and standard of living much higher than some European countries.

On the other hand, I have nothing but admiration for our Prime Minister. It was generous on the part of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to agree to settle the issue at the International Court of Justice. Malaysian leaders have always believed in settling disputes in a civilised way, to be precise, the Malaysian way.

I want to see Malaysia and Singapore live in the spirit of Asean. I want to see my children and grandchildren understand the meaning of peace, prosperity and harmony.

Above all, I want them to understand the meaning of "to be civilised".