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Dr M: Singapore agrees to look into reclamation issue

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PETALING JAYA, Wed. - Singapore, which initially rejected Malaysia's claims that the reclamation works in the republic's waters off Pulau Tekong will pose problems to Malaysia, has now agreed to look into the matter, the Prime Minister said today.

"Singapore initially rejected our claims that there were problems but now has agreed to look into the issue after we submitted our protests," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He was asked whether Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had given any commitment on resolving the land reclamation issue when they met on Monday.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang today before flying off to Russia for an official visit.

Several Malaysian leaders have expressed concern that the work could affect the shipping lanes at the area especially for ships heading for the Pasir Gudang port.

Singapore leaders including Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong had claimed that the reclamation work was being done within the republic's border and did not pose problems for Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir was optimistic the issue would be resolved amicably if there was goodwill on both parties.

Asked to comment on whether the Government would come up with a new formula over the sale of water to Singapore Dr Mahathir said: "We cannot reveal our new formula yet. We are still working on it. We already have an idea on how it (formula) will work and we will present it to Singapore."

He said Singapore would not want Malaysia to negotiate the matter through the Press.

Asked on the quantum of price increase, Dr Mahathir said the present price of three sen per 1,000 gallons of raw water was not logical and that it had to be more.

On whether the Malaysia-Singapore negotiation package would be expanded to cover other matters, Dr Mahathir said: "The land issue and all others will be in the package. We will include all the new things that have cropped up."

Asked about Barisan Nasional's chances of retaining the Ketari state seat in the March 31 by-election, he said the BN would win.

Dr Mahathir and wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali left today for an eight-day visit to Russia, Germany and Poland.

Present at the RMAF base to bid them farewell were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Cabinet ministers and senior government officials.

The Prime Minister and his delegation are scheduled to be in Russia from March 14 to 16, in Germany from March 18 to 20 and in Poland on March 21 and 22.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to meet President Vladimir Putin and deliver his keynote address on "Globalisation: Towards a Fair and Prosperous Market" at the Malaysia-Russia Forum in Moscow.

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