

We've a right to be in Batu Puteh: Dr M

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PETALING JAYA: The prime minister gave Singapore a lesson on the meaning of the word "disputed" yesterday.

Stressing that Malaysia does not acknowledge Singapore's control of Pulau Batu Puteh nor its surrounding waters, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said: "The island and its surrounding waters are still in dispute. Thus, just like Singapore, we too, have a right."

He said when Malaysia was still in dispute with Indonesia over the ownership of Sipadan and Ligitan, Malaysia did not stop Indonesia from entering the islands.

"This was because the islands were still in dispute and thus Malaysia did not chase them away," he said at the RMAF base in Subang on his return from Lebanon, Egypt and Switzerland.

Mahathir was commenting on recent remarks by Singapore that Pulau Batu Puteh belongs to the republic and that Malaysia should not intrude into its waters.

Singapore Defence Minister Dr Tan Keng Yam told Malaysia last week to stop the "repeated intrusions" by its naval and police boats in the waters off the island.

Mahathir also refuted Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar's statement that the republic's actions on Pulau Batu Puteh were no different from Malaysia's own actions on Pulau Sipadan.

"No, in Sipadan, the Indonesians went there and some of them landed there, we didn't stop them. It (Sipadan) was in dispute. We didn't behave like Singapore, we didn't chase them (the Indonesians) away ... and we didn't fight against them and we didn't try to shoo them off," he said.

Singapore and Malaysia have agreed to refer their dispute over the tiny outcrop of Pulau Batu Puteh to the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Mahathir said Singapore's warning to Malaysia, issued at a time when it continues to encroach into Malaysian airspace, reflects the republic's arrogance.