

We win some, we lose some, says Mahathir

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PUTRAJAYA: The prime minister has termed as ridiculous a suggestion by Singapore that Malaysia's grounds for referring the republic's reclamation works in the Johor Straits for international adjudication lacked merit.

"Until you take the case to arbitration, you wouldn't know if you are right or wrong," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday after attending his last meeting with mentris besar and chief ministers at the Prime Minister's Office, reports Bernama.

The Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs said yesterday the republic will continue with preparation to argue the merits of Malaysia's claims before the Arbitral Tribunal in order to convince it to reject the claims.

Mahathir said he did not bother at all whether Malaysia would win or lose in its case at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (Itlos), but more importantly, to know if it is right or not for Singapore to undertake the land reclamation.

"Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. That's the essence of arbitration.

"You can't say that you take a case to arbitration, then you lose, therefore you are wrong," he said.

Mahathir said he believed any country which faced a similar situation would surely take the case to arbitration.

He said Malaysia also welcomed the Itlos' unanimous decision in Hamburg on Wednesday to order both parties to cooperate and to set up a group of independent experts with terms of reference agreed upon

by both sides.

According to the tribunal, he said, the group would have to conduct a study to determine the effects of Singapore's land reclamation and to propose measures to deal with adverse effects.

"On the other hand, they have to form the committee of experts and if it is found that they are causing some problem for Malaysia, they will have to stop," he said.

Earlier, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad

Badawi said the panel of experts should be set up as soon as possible, reports **Ng Kee Seng**.

"Although the decision by Itlos was not what we expected, it was also not what Singapore wanted," he said yesterday.

Abdullah also said Wisma Putra would coordinate the setting up of the group.

He was responding to questions after flagging off a Peace Malaysia motor convoy at Putra World Trade Centre.

Both Malaysia and Singapore have called the Itlos verdict

a victory. Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia had achieved what it wanted, namely, to be informed and consulted on the land reclamation project.

In Singapore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement the decision "upholds the position which Singapore has maintained all along, that is that Singapore's reclamation works, which are carried out strictly within its territorial waters, are in full compliance with international law".