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Mahathir-Arbitration

M'SIA OPTED FOR ARBITRATION AFTER NEGOTIATIONS FAILED - DR M

JITRA, Sept 7 (Bernama) -- Malaysia opted for arbitration to resolve the land reclamation issue with Singapore after several rounds of negotiations with the republic failed, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

After negotiations ended in a deadlock, engaging a third party to solve the problem was the best option, he said.

He said several rounds of discussions were held but there seemed to be no solution insight.

Instead, Singapore tried to put Malaysia in a bad light on the land reclamation issue, he said.

"We have been trying to negotiate for years but Singapore went round telling others that they are right in the issue. Previously, we chose to negotiate but negotiations were unsuccessful, it's unlikely that we'll opt for war," he told reporters after a closed-door meeting with Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders in the Kubang Pasu parliamentary constituency.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked to comment on a statement by the Singapore Foreign Ministry that the Singapore Government was disappointed over Malaysia's decision to bring the republic's land reclamation issue to arbitration and not resolve it through negotiations.

Dr Mahathir likened the arbitration to that of two people quarrelling.

"When two people quarrel and they cannot settle it, they bring their problem to a third party," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Singapore had been informed of Malaysia's intention to bring the issue to arbitration.

However, he did not know what was Singapore's response to Malaysia's move.

"I don't know what's their response, I think there is," he said when asked what was the official response from the Singapore government when informed of Malaysia's move to use arbitration to resolve the issue.

In KOTA TINGGI, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia sent a "Third Person Note" to Singapore on July 4, which enclosed technical reports on how the republic's reclamation works had affected the country.

In the note, Malaysia also gave Singapore a notice that it was referring the reclamation issue to international arbitration under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982, he said.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia hoped the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea could issue a temporary order to Singapore to stop the reclamation work before the two countries could find a solution.

He said the reclamation work could not go on while negotiations were in progress because it would have serious consequences on Malaysia.

The Singapore Foreign Ministry yesterday rejected suggestions to stop the reclamation works which it described as "Malaysia's pre-condition for further consultations."

"Such talks should be held without any pre-conditions. Suspension of works is a very serious matter. It would only be justified if there is clear evidence of serious and imminent damage," it said.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia did not want to quarrel with Singapura over the issue.

He said Kuala Lumpur would leave it to the process of the International Tribunal based in Hamburg, Germany to resolve the issue amicably.

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