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Hamidon-Sand

PLANNED SAND IMPORT FROM INDON FOR SELF USE, SAYS ENVOY

By: Openg Onn

PEKANBARU (Riau) Nov 13 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's decision to import sand from the Riau Province on Sumatera Island is for the country's use and not to be sold to Singapore for a profit.

Stating this here today, the Malaysian Ambassador to Indonesia, Datuk Hamidon Ali, said the sand, if the deal materialised, would be used for reclamation work at the Tanjung Pelepas Port in Johore and the Malacca reclamation project.

"We have our own sand but economically it is cheaper to get it from Indonesia," he said when asked to comment on the proposed sand deal between the two countries.

Hamidon arrived here yesterday for a two-day working visit where he met both the out-going Governor, Haji Salleh Djasit, and his successor, Haji Muhammad Rusli Zainal, and Malaysian Consulate staff.

Earlier, he visited the Malaysian Consulate-General in Medan, capital of neighbouring North Sumatera Province.

Last month, Indonesia's Maritime and Fisheries Minister, Rukhmin Dahuri, had approached former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in Bali during the ASEAN Summit, to discuss the possibility of exporting sand to Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir had expressed interest provided Indonesia came up with a suitable price and that it would not cause any environmental hazards along the Riau coast, where the sand would be extracted from.

However, several environmentalists and Indonesian leaders opposed the planned deal, accusing Malaysia of trying to make a profit by selling the sand to Singapore which is carrying out intensive land reclamation work along several stretches of its coastline.

The Indonesian Government and environmentalists had been accusing Singapore of buying sand illegally from the Riau Province, causing environmental damage to several of its islands which had submerged due to over exploitation.

The Government, in an attempt to put a stop to such activities said to be carried out by some local businessmen, had from February this year imposed a total ban on the extraction of sand in the province.

Indonesian officials estimate the illegal sand business to be worth about US\$200 (about RM760 million) million a year and that more than 300 million cubic metres of sand are removed annually from Riau, situated just a few kilometers away from Singapore and Johore, across the Malacca Straits.

-- BERNAMA

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