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S'pore-Agreement

S'PORE WILL CONSIDER ANY DATE AND PLACE, SAYS JAYAKUMAR

SINGAPORE, Jan 6 (Bernama) -- Singapore says it is prepared to sign the special accord to refer the overlapping claims to Pulau Batu Puteh to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

The deal can be signed anywhere, the Straits Times quoted Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar in response to Malaysia's rejection, on Saturday, of Singapore's proposal that it be done in Brussels later this month.

"I don't see this as a major issue.... It's not something that we have to quibble about. It's not going to make the slightest difference as to what is going to be the outcome of the court proceedings," Jayakumar said at a grassroots event in Bedok yesterday.

He said that Singapore would consider any other date Malaysia proposes for the signing of the pact, which will bring the dispute over who has sovereignty over the island and Horsburgh Lighthouse to the court in The Hague.

Yesterday, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said that Malaysia would submit a new date to Singapore, and that it may suggest the signing be during the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) meeting in Kuala Lumpur next month.

"It's very likely that we can have it in January...otherwise, I think we can do it in February.... I would prefer it (the special agreement) to be signed in Malaysia or they (Singapore) want to sign it in Singapore...it's not a problem to me," he said at a news conference in Kota Tinggi, Johor.

On Friday, Singapore proposed that the special agreement be signed on the sidelines of the Asean-European Union meeting in Brussels to be held on Jan 27 or Jan 28.

Jayakumar yesterday explained that Brussels was suggested in response to KL's wish to have the Special Agreement signed as quickly as possible, and Brussels, he added, was the earliest occasion the two foreign ministers would meet.

On Saturday, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad rejected the proposal for a Brussels signing, saying that the two sides should "do it here" (Kuala Lumpur).

The dispute over the tiny rocky outcrop 15 nautical miles off Pengerang, Johor, arose in the 1970's and Malaysia and Singapore agreed in 1991 to refer the matter to the ICJ.

Malaysia had proposed six or seven dates to sign the accord but all were rejected by the republic.

Jayakumar said yesterday that Malaysia had, in the past, even proposed the pact be signed in Singapore. "Sign in Singapore, sign in Malaysia, sign anywhere in the world -- it doesn't make any difference," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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