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Dredging up bad faith

SINGAPORE'S decision to continue with reclamation work at Tuas and Pulau Tekong reeks of bad faith. The absence of sincerity is especially telling given that land-filling continues unabated even as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea prepares to deliver judgment tomorrow on Malaysia's application for provisional measures.

Millions of tonnes of sand are being ferried to the project site, with the topography of the area changing by the day. Will Singapore be able to restore the environmental integrity of the Malaysian zone abutting the project, or indeed the livelihood of Malaysian fishermen, or reverse the impact upon the ports of Tanjong Pelepas and Pasir Gudang, if the outcome of judicial review is adverse to it? Surely not, as there is no going back as far as nature and history are concerned.

The die is thus being cast with Singapore's decision to proceed with land mass expansion regardless of the dictates of natural justice. It has displayed scant regard for international law as it pursues self-interest at any cost. Malaysia, on the other hand, continues to stick to the rules of engagement in line with accepted international conduct. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has little recourse besides considering a protest note to Singapore and letting the law take its course. Malaysia will continue to deal with moral rectitude in the matter, as has been our *modus operandi* since this regrettable episode began.

The lack of respect for the interests of Malaysia has been evident from day one when Singapore embarked on the project without Malaysia's concurrence. If indeed the project is as innocuous as the republic has been assiduously claiming, making a clean breast of it with Malaysia would have been the first thing to do. But it has chosen the way of the self-righteous: trampling on the rights of others out of a false sense of right and wrong.

Nations have to remember that it is often how they play the game of international relations that counts, not the results at the end of play. For in the final analysis, it is respect for the rights of others that determines whether one can belong in a community of equals.