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Republic's official amused over `words of war' reports

YESTERDAY'S Straits Times reported that a merchant ship had hit a Singapore naval vessel near Pulau Batu Puteh.

It said the Singapore anti-submarine ship collided with the vessel late on Friday, injuring eight people.

The accident between the RSS Courageous and the ANL Indonesia, a container vessel headed for South Korea, occurred minutes before midnight off the island, the newspaper quoted a Government official.

Yesterday also saw the newspaper carrying a report by Chua Lee Hoong headlined "War? It's all a Malaysian game" which saw an anonymous Singapore official claiming that Malaysia had been making "contradictory and absurd allegations" in recent weeks with regard to Pulau Batu Puteh. "Some Singapore officials are finding words of war from up north rather amusing."

In tones hugely dismissive of recent remarks reported in the Malaysian media, an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told The Straits Times yesterday that so many "contradictory and absurd allegations" had come out in recent weeks that "it is difficult to know what they really mean or to take what they say all that seriously".

Chua, writing about the "Malaysian game", claimed it was clear that Malaysia had been making threatening noises by using words like "war" loosely. He did not mention the instance when Singapore naval vessels warned off a Malaysian Marine Police craft which had entered waters off the disputed island.

"The Minister believed Dr Mahathir made the remarks out of frustration with Singapore `for being arrogant in settling several bilateral issues'," the newspaper said.

The newspaper, referring to Syed Hamid's clarification earlier in the week that he had not mentioned Singapore in reference to Dr Mahathir's warning against the "forward defence" policy of some nations, quoted the unnamed Singapore official as declaring it "the flip-flop characteristic behaviour".

"Malaysia's politicians have, for whatever reason, been trying to stir up emotions and intimidate Singapore. But Singaporeans have got used to the tantrums and are not impressed," The Straits Times quoted him as saying.