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Singapore's right to refer railway dispute to arbitration, says DPM

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Singapore has the right to refer the Tanjung Pagar railway land issue to third-party arbitration, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said the republic was entitled to seek international adjudication for the dispute, just as Malaysia had done concerning land reclamation at Pulau Tekong and Tuas.

However, Malaysia will study the letter Singapore had sent to inform that it would be seeking arbitration, before issuing a response.

"We will study the letter and respond appropriately. We've been very busy with the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

"It's Singapore's right to bring the matter for arbitration, just as it was our right to refer their land reclamation to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea."

Abdullah was speaking at a Press conference after launching the Fifth International Conference on Traditional and Complementary Medicine today.

He was asked about Singapore's Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar's statement in Parliament last week that the republic wanted to refer the Tanjung Pagar issue to a third party, either the International Court of Justice or the International Permanent Court of Arbitration.

Singapore had written a Third Party Note to Malaysia conveying its intentions. The letter was sent on Sept 26, but Malaysia has yet to respond.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar was last week reported as saying that the ministry would wait for the advice of its legal advisers, before issuing a response.

KTM Bhd owns land in Tanjung Pagar, which lies in the heart of Singapore and is considered prime real estate.

The KTM station, and Malaysia's customs, immigration and quarantine complex are located there.

Singapore wants Malaysia to relocate the station under a Points of Agreement (POA) pact, which also deals with the development of the KTM land there.

The dispute is now over when the POA takes effect, as both countries have a different interpretation of when the station's move should be affected. The pact was signed by then Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew and Malaysia's then Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin, on Nov 27, 1990.

It was reported that in February 2001, Malaysia and Singapore decided on the station's move to Kranji during Abdullah's official visit to the republic.

But in September that year, in talks between Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kwan Yew and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, it was agreed that KTM's land in Tanjung Pagar would be swapped for a piece of land of equal value in the republic's Shenton Way area.

A Singapore MP raised the issue in Parliament last week.