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'WE WON'T ENCROACH ON S'PORE WATERS'

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It is within Malaysia's rights to expand JB port, says PM

NOR AIN MOHAMED RADHI
AND AZURA ABAS
SHAH ALAM
cnews@nstp.com.my

IT is well within Malaysia's rights to extend the Johor Baru port as it does not encroach on Singapore's territorial waters off Tuas, said Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said Malaysia would ensure that the expansion of the port was within the country's borders.

"We can measure and see whether we have encroached on their borders, and (ensure) that we are within our waters," he said after launching the 21st Congress of the Union of Pos Malaysia Uniformed Staff here yesterday.

On Tuesday, the republic's Transport Ministry said it noted "with grave concern" Malaysia's purported move to expand its port boundaries, which violates sovereignty and international laws.

It said it would not hesitate to

"take firm action against intrusions and unauthorised activities".

It claimed that ships and vessels from Malaysia had intruded into Singapore's territorial waters off Tuas over the past two weeks, including vessels from the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) and the Marine Department.

The ministry has since lodged a protest with the Malaysian government, but also indicated that it was ready to engage with Malaysia to find an amicable solution.

In **Putrajaya**, Transport Minister Anthony Loke Siew Fook urged Singapore to immediately withdraw its Port Marine Circular issued on Nov 30 and prevent its enforcement agencies from further intruding into Malaysia's territorial waters and harassing vessels lawfully permitted to enter the country's territorial sea.

He said the actions by Singapore amounted to serious violations of Malaysia's sovereignty and international law.

He said such actions were not conducive to good bilateral relations, which could cause confusion for the international shipping community, and lead to increased navigational and safety risks.

"Malaysia is prepared to engage with Singapore to find an

amicable solution to the matter."

He said Singapore's claims were inaccurate as the altered port limits had not encroached on any part of Singapore.

He said Singapore had, in recent years, carried out extensive land reclamation in the area in question.

"It is trite law that land reclamation does not extend a state's basepoints and/or baselines."

In accordance with international law, the territorial sea of Singapore remained unchanged even when reclamation had been carried out almost to the outer limits of Singapore's territorial sea, said Loke.

"As such, the altered port limits of Johor Baru Port are in Malaysia's territorial sea and it is well within Malaysia's rights to draw any port limit in our territorial sea.

"Malaysia has taken prudent action to promulgate the alteration via our Federal Government Gazette, and to issue port circular and notice to mariners."

Loke said it was within Malaysia's rights as a sovereign state to deploy its enforcement and relevant agencies in its territorial sea.

"This practice is consistent with international law and, as such, the MMEA and the Marine Department have not intruded into any part of Singapore."