

## SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

# PM'S REMARK DOESN'T SUPPORT CHINA'S CLAIM'

Claims of selling off nation's sovereignty unethical, immoral and irresponsible, says Datuk Agus

KUALA LUMPUR

**P**RIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's statement on overlapping oil exploration claims in the

South China Sea does not represent an acknowledgement of

China's right to the area. Instead, it is meant to uphold it as Malaysia's exclusive economic zone at the negotiation table, said Datuk Dr Mohammad Agus Yusoff, who is director-general of the Community Communications Department in the Prime Minister's Department.

He said the prime minister spoke out on the issue as China had made the same claim.

"The prime minister had addressed the issue with the Chinese government after the latter stated that they were staking a claim to the same area.

"The prime minister's statement appears to have been ma-

nipulated by the Opposition as peddling the nation's sovereignty, and later used to attack him by claiming the statement had offended the public.

"They (the Opposition) think the prime minister isn't worthy of leading the country.

"Is it wrong for the prime minister to state that Malaysia's territories will be defended at the negotiation table?

"Such negotiations are important in order for us to resolve conflicts peacefully and constructively, especially with China, which is a world superpower," he said in a statement.

Agus labelled the move by certain quarters to accuse the prime minister of selling off the nation's sovereignty as irresponsible, unethical and immoral.

"I have two pieces of advice. The first — even if we are from different political parties, do not play around with the issue of national sovereignty.

"Secondly, politicise with facts. The prime minister and all of us want what's best for the country.

"If we're not happy with the prime minister's decision, criticise in a courteous manner.

"As a nation, our main responsibility is to deliver the right narrative to the people. We also have to collectively uphold our sovereignty," he said.

Last Saturday, the prime minister said the government would not compromise on the issue of territories within the South China Sea, which are under dispute with China.

He said both countries had agreed that any dispute should be resolved at the negotiation table.

Perikatan Nasional chairman Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin earlier had claimed that Anwar had been "careless" in his remarks over Malaysia's position on the South China Sea issue.

He said Anwar's statement gave the impression that Malaysia acknowledged China's claim over the disputed area.

Anwar, in response, had lambasted Muhyiddin's remarks, claiming that they were not based on his actual statement regarding the issue.



**Datuk Dr Mohammad Agus Yusoff**



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim speaking with a Rahmah Cash Aid recipient during the Rahmah Cash Aid programme held by Bank Simpanan Nasional at its Meru Raya branch in Ipoh, Perak, yesterday. PIC BY L. MANIMARAN