

'Dr M made a unilateral decision'

Cabinet only informed over Batu Puteh issue two days later, say former ministers

PETALING JAYA: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad acted unilaterally on the Batu Puteh sovereignty issue when he was the prime minister, according to three former ministers who served in the Cabinet in 2018.

In a joint statement, former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, former defence minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu and then transport minister Anthony Loke said Dr Mahathir had decided on May 21, 2018, not to pursue the claim for Batu Puteh in a written state-

ment to the Solicitor General without referring to the Cabinet.

Dr Mahathir, then the Langkawi MP, was in his second tenure as prime minister.

In the current federal administration, Mohamad is the Agriculture and Food Security Minister while Loke still holds the Transport portfolio.

"The matter was also conveyed to Singapore before the first Cabinet meeting on May 23, 2018.

The Cabinet was only informed of the decision two days after it was made and we stress here that

we were only informed under 'other matters'... It was not a discussion to make a decision," the trio said yesterday.

As such, they said, the issue of supporting or rejecting the matter does not arise as the window of opportunity was lost when Dr Mahathir issued a written statement.

"We are of the opinion that Dr Mahathir should take full responsibility for the decision, rather than place it on the shoulders of people who were not involved.

"We are confident the other

Cabinet ministers at the meeting on May 23 can attest to this," they added.

Their statement was issued following the press conference held by Dr Mahathir on Tuesday where he said the decision not to appeal the International Court of Justice's decision to award Batu Puteh to Singapore was made with the then Cabinet's full agreement in 2018.

Separately, at the Home Ministry's monthly assembly yesterday, Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail also said the decision on Batu Puteh was made

prior to the Cabinet meeting in May 2018, in line with the chronology stated in Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) report on the matter.

"It seems like he (Dr Mahathir) is grasping at straws by attempting to implicate the ministers in his Cabinet then," the Home Minister told a press conference.

Saifuddin Nasution, who was also a minister helming the domestic trade, cooperatives and consumerism ministry then under Dr Mahathir's rule, said the people should follow the facts as stated in the RCI report.

Timeline of Batu Puteh tussle

1851

The British East India Company (EIC) completed construction of Horsburgh Lighthouse on Batu Puteh.

1979

The dispute over Batu Puteh, Middle Rocks, and South Ledge between Malaysia and Singapore begins.

Feb 3, 2017

The Malaysian government filed an application for a revision of the ICJ's ruling in awarding legal jurisdiction of Batu Puteh to Singapore. Scheduled hearing was on June 11, 2018.

2018

The Pakatan Harapan government under then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad withdrew both applications.

2022

The then PM Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said possible negligence and oversight on Dr Mahathir's part in handling the Batu Puteh claim.

Feb 14, 2023

Batu Puteh RCI established with former chief justice Tun Md Raus Sharif as chairman.

Dec 5, 2024

RCI report made public in Parliament.

Dec 12, 2024

> Former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, and two other Cabinet members Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu and Anthony Loke say Dr Mahathir on May 21, 2018 had acted unilaterally and only informed the Cabinet of the decision two days later.
> The Dewan Rakyat debates on the RCI report.

1964

The management of the lighthouse on Batu Puteh was transferred to Singapore after the Straits Settlements were dissolved.

2008

Case was referred to the ICJ, which ruled that Pedra Branca belongs to Singapore while Middle Rocks belongs to Malaysia, with the sovereignty of South Ledge remaining unclear.

June 30, 2017

Putrajaya filed an application to interpret the ICJ's judgment to address its ambiguities and implications, particularly regarding the status of South Ledge.

2021

Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim demanded an explanation why the Federal Government had dropped the review application.

Jan 27, 2023

The then Attorney general (AG) Tan Sri Idrus Harun said the Cabinet stated act of withdrawing the review application was "not in order and improper."

Aug 12, 2024

The RCI submitted its final report to His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia.

Dec 10, 2024

Dr Mahathir issues a statement, saying that the decision on Batu Puteh was made with the full agreement of the Cabinet in 2018.

