

Najib: No reason to blame Singapore for floods

NST 4/2

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KUALA LUMPUR: Assumptions cannot be made that massive land reclamation work by Singapore at Pulau Tekong contributed to the recent floods in Johor.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said without a proper and in-depth technical study, it would be preposterous to point fingers.

“People are fond of making all kinds of accusations. This ought to be substantiated.

“I learnt that excessive rain over a 24-hour period in some areas, which is unusual, may have contributed to the floods,” he said in reference to remarks made by Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

Ghani blamed the land reclamation for having narrowed the river mouth of Sungai Johor,

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causing massive flooding in Kota Tinggi.

He said the narrowing of the delta had slowed the discharge of excess rain water into the Johor Straits.

Najib said the government had

appointed a technical committee to study the terms of reference under the bilateral agreement with Singapore.

He had earlier launched a book, *On Command and Leadership*, authored by armed forces chief Laksamana Tan Sri Mohamad Anwar Mohamad Nor at Wisma Pertahanan yesterday.

Kota Tinggi suffered from repeated flooding as it is a riverine locality.

In addition, excess rain water from upstream and the surrounding catchment areas also flowed into the Sungai Johor, causing it to burst its banks and flood the town.

Singapore started land reclamation work in 2002 along the eastern and western parts of the Johor Straits near the Malaysian mainland. The work, involving 5,214ha of sea area, is expected to be completed in 2010.

It will lengthen the headland in

Tuas by 7km and double the size of Pulau Tekong, which is located across the river mouth of Sungai Johor.

Malaysia launched international arbitration proceedings against Singapore in October 2003, saying the land reclamation had damaged its interests by, among other things, narrowing the shipping lanes around the Johor Straits.

It also applied to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea for an interim order to stop the reclamation work.

The Hamburg-based tribunal heard the case in September 2003. It ruled that the reclamation could continue, but ordered both sides to set up an independent group of experts to study the impact.

The parties agreed that the recommendations would be used as the basis of a “mutually acceptable and beneficial solution”.