

## Malaysia summons Singapore envoy as spying claims widen

*By Barry Porter & Manirajan Ramasamy - Nov 26, 2013 9:15 PM GMT+0800*

Malaysia summoned Singapore's high commissioner today to respond to allegations of spying which risk damaging improved political and business ties between the Southeast Asian neighbors.

Indonesia and Malaysia have been key targets for Australian and U.S. intelligence cooperation since the 1970s, facilitated in part by Singapore, the Sydney Morning Herald reported yesterday, citing documents leaked by former U.S. intelligence contractor Edward Snowden. Malaysia's foreign ministry said it was "extremely concerned" and had already acted against earlier claims of espionage by the U.S. and Australia.



*Lee Hsien Loong, Singapore's prime minister, and his Malaysian counterpart Najib Razak shake hands in front of Malaysia's landmark Putra Mosque in Putrajaya. Source: Government House/AFP/Getty Images*



*Traffic flows in both directions over the one-kilometer long causeway that bisects the Johor Strait and links Singapore in the foreground with Malaysia in the background at dusk. Photographer: Jonathan Drake/Bloomberg*

“It cannot be overemphasized that spying against a good friend and neighbor is unacceptable and goes against the true spirit of and commitment to good neighborly relations,” Anifah Aman, Malaysia’s foreign minister, said in an e-mailed statement before this morning’s meeting. “If those allegations are eventually proven, it is certainly a serious matter.”

Relations between Singapore and Malaysia have improved after half a century of tensions over issues such as water supply and ownership of a railway station, with the neighbors cooperating on real estate projects on both sides of the border and seeking to improve transport links. Malaysia is a party to the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations with Singapore and the U.S.

### ***‘Accepted Norms’***

The Sydney Morning Herald cited a map from the U.S. National Security Agency and leaked by Snowden showing Singapore forming part of a global network where cable traffic could be tapped. Michele Batchelor, a spokeswoman for Singapore Telecommunications Ltd. (ST), declined to comment. SingTel is 52 percent-owned by Temasek Holdings Pte, Singapore’s state-owned investment company.

Ong Keng Yong, Singapore’s high commissioner, said he met with Malaysian Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Othman Hashim today to clarify various news reports. The envoy later said in a phone interview he had referred the articles to relevant agencies in Singapore and didn’t have any information to comment further.

“Singapore values our good relations with Malaysia,” Ong said. “We have no interest in doing anything that might harm our partnership or the friendship between our two countries.”

The secretary-general conveyed Malaysia’s deep concern over the alleged spying by Singapore, which had angered citizens, Malaysia’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement late today. The alleged activities aren’t done among partners and close neighbors, the ministry said.

### ***Snowden’s Allegations***

Malaysia said in a statement last month it had sought clarification from U.S. Ambassador Joseph Y. Yun following allegations by Snowden that the U.S. had 90 electronic surveillance facilities worldwide, including at its Kuala Lumpur embassy. Yun said he’d received instructions to review the scope of surveillance, it said, without giving details.

“I don’t think we should be surprised that these sort of diplomatic statecraft are being practiced, even by the closest of neighbors,” said Eugene Tan, an associate law professor



Publication: Bloomberg  
Date: 26 November 2013  
Headline: Malaysia summons Singapore envoy as spying claims widen

at Singapore Management University. "The question now is whether some of the intelligence gathering may have crossed accepted norms."

The reports could also spur friction between Singapore and Indonesia, Tan said. "The Indonesians would probably be concerned whether the information is also being shared with Singapore intelligence, besides the Australians."

### ***Indonesia Friction***

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott has written to Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono as he seeks to repair relations after claims the phones of Indonesia's leaders were tapped.

Yudhoyono halted cooperation with the Abbott government on asylum seekers and military operations after withdrawing his ambassador from Canberra last week, as tensions between the two countries reached their highest point in 14 years.

Yudhoyono's spokesman Teuku Faizasyah didn't respond to a mobile phone message seeking comment today.

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