



'Joint development' is key

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Amid rising tension in the South China Sea, former Senior Minister S Jayakumar yesterday called on the countries concerned to consider the option of joint development.

Territorial disputes and disputes over maritime delimitation are highly emotive issues, he said. "Many countries are reluctant to refer such disputes to adjudication or arbitration because the daunting prospect of losing the disputed territory is politically untenable," said Prof Jayakumar in a keynote address at the Centre for International Law's Conference on Joint Development and the South China Sea.

But there was a way out. The countries concerned, China, Vietnam and the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan, could consider the option of joint development.

Accusations of unlawful intrusions in the South China Sea are not uncommon but this latest bout of tension has run longer than usual. "Such periodic escalation of tensions over competing claims is not conducive for regional stability," said Prof Jayakumar, Singapore's Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1994 to 2004.

The conference, he said, will explore existing joint development arrangements in Asia to see which may be applicable to the South China Sea.

"Hopefully, this will encourage discussion and debate on what appears to be one of the more viable solutions to the South China Sea disputes and mark a step forward on the long road towards a peaceful resolution."

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SINGAPORE: Amid rising tension in the South China Sea, former Senior Minister S. Jayakumar on Thursday called on the countries concerned to consider the option of joint development.

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Jayakumar: Spratly tensions worrying

By Zakir Hussain

THE current flaring of tensions over disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea is 'particularly dangerous and disturbing', Professor S. Jayakumar said on Thursday as he called on parties involved to clarify the extent of their claims.

Major powers China and the United States must also act to avoid conflict there, he told a conference on joint development and the South China Sea.

'Such periodic escalation of tensions over competing claims is not conducive for regional stability,' said the law and foreign policy veteran, who retired as senior minister last month.

He suggested parties work instead to jointly develop oil and gas resources in disputed waters.

The Spratly Islands and reefs are claimed entirely or in part by Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan.

Many are occupied by claimants and some have even been fortified, he noted at the conference organised by the National University of Singapore's Centre for International Law.

Read the full report in Friday's edition of The Straits Times.

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