

## **Book on land reclamation case launched** **Besides recalling drama, it serves as reminder of issue of conflicting legal rights**

**Grace Chua**

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ONE September day in 2003, Mr Lionel Yee was on a plane coming in to land at Changi when it flew over Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong.

Then a legal officer in the Attorney-General's Chambers, he was returning from Hamburg after presenting Singapore's case at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (Itlos). It involved a dispute with Malaysia which alleged that land reclamation at Tekong was harming the environment and causing navigation problems.



*(From left) Mr Lionel Yee, Judicial Commissioner in the Supreme Court, Ministry of National Development deputy secretary Cheong Koon Hean, Minister for Law and Foreign Affairs K. Shanmugam, and Ambassador-at-large Tommy Koh at the launch of the book yesterday. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE*

Mr Yee, now Judicial Commissioner in the Supreme Court, passed the islands in an instant. "That's what we had been fighting for, for so many weeks and months," he said.

Last night, he and his co-authors, Ambassador-at-large Tommy Koh and Ministry of National Development deputy secretary Cheong Koon Hean, launched a book on the landmark case.

All three were key

members of the Singapore team at the tribunal.

Malaysia & Singapore: The Land Reclamation Case - From Dispute To Settlement, was launched at the National Museum by Minister for Law and Foreign Affairs K. Shanmugam.

It details the dispute over reclamation projects at Tuas, Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong when in 2003, Malaysia took Singapore before the Itlos in a bid to halt reclamation work that had started in 2000.

The dispute raised a larger issue of conflicting legal rights - Singapore's to reclaim part of its sea for national needs, and Malaysia's to protect its maritime environment from harm.

It was resolved when international experts showed the reclamation was not causing major environmental damage. Both countries agreed on minor changes to the Tekong reclamation and to monitor the area's ecology.

Mr Shanmugam said the case should be captured for posterity, and remarked on what it reflected about ties between the countries: "When we agree that we can go to third party adjudication, it doesn't hold any particular issue as so central that it holds the entire relationship hostage."

The \$26.75 book is published by The Straits Times Press and the Centre for International Law and the Institute of Policy Studies at the National University of Singapore. All royalties will be donated to The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund.