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Malaysia-Singapore
DR MAHATHIR CALLS FOR FLEXIBILITY

SINGAPORE, Feb 14 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Singapore can resolve many of their bilateral problems if both countries could be flexible, The Straits Times today reported Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir as saying.

In an interview with Singapore's The Straits Times and Business Times in Kuala Lumpur yesterday ahead of Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's visit on Monday, Dr Mahathir said both countries should not stick rigidly to their positions.

Both sides must be willing to see each other's point of view, he said.

The Straits Times quoted Dr Mahathir as saying that there must be areas for compromise or there was no point talking at all.

"We are prepared not to be rigid and we expect that both sides must do it... Being flexible is being willing to give up something to gain something," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there was a feeling in Singapore that Malaysia would stop water supply to the republic on expiry of an existing agreement in 2061.

This, he said, was not Malaysia's intention and he was willing to negotiate if it was not to Malaysia's disadvantage.

"We can't imagine us on a particular date switching off everything. That will result in total disaster. We don't do that to our neighbours," he said.

"Obviously, we want to see what is the benefit to us when the new agreement is negotiated," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia had a different interpretation of the Points Of Agreement (POA) signed with Singapore in 1990.

The POA, signed between then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and then Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin, sets out the terms on the development and status of land owned by Malayan Railway (KTM) in Singapore.

Dr Mahathir said the differences over the POA need not be a stumbling block to better Singapore-Malaysia ties, which became strained over Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's remarks last year about crime in Johor.

He said Malaysia and Singapore could work for better ties and both could compete with and complement each other.

Dr Mahathir also said bilateral relations now were much better compared to last year.

Asked about the historical baggage to be cast aside from the separation in 1965, he said, "we can cast aside, we can forget, but we should not create new things that cause complications".

The Business Times, in its report, said Dr Mahathir dismissed notions that Malaysia wanted to be treated as a "big brother".

"We don't look upon Singapore as a younger brother or anything like that," he said.

"I have been told that Singaporeans complain that we want to be regarded as the elder brother. We don't." -- BERNAMA

THG RM