

07 NOV 1998

Singapore-editorial

MAHATHIR-GOH MEETING A TINY STEP FORWARD IN BILATERAL TIES- ST

SINGAPORE, Nov 7 (Bernama) -- The resumption of talks between the prime ministers of Malaysia and Singapore in Kuala Lumpur last Thursday was described by the Straits Times (ST) as a "tiny step forward" and offers a glimmer of hope that bilateral ties could improve.

However, real efforts and commitment were required and nothing should be taken for granted, the pro-government newspaper said in its editorial today.

"Let there be no misunderstanding about this. The harsh economic realities demonstrate, yet again, that cooperation between two close neighbours is a far better option than an adversarial relationship."

"If there is anything to learn from the economic crisis, it is that it helps to concentrate minds on what works, and what does not, between neighbours. Nothing should be taken for granted," said the editorial.

The latest meeting between Malaysia's Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Singaporean counterpart Goh Chok Tong was their fifth this year after a long break since April during which bilateral ties had soured over several issues.

On Goh's promise to help raise funds for Malaysia, the ST editorial said that experience had shown that there was a long way to go before there could be any agreement.

It said Singapore must be certain of two critical points. Firstly, there must be no ambiguity about any pact that is to be hammered out and secondly, Singaporeans want to be convinced that whatever amount of their money that is being invested in Malaysia is spent purposefully and wisely.

"Under no circumstances must there be any repeat of the problems that cropped up after the Points of Agreement (POA) on Malayan Railway land was signed," it said of the POA which centred on the development of railway land owned by the Malaysian government here.

The two countries have differed on the interpretation of the POA that was signed in 1990 between then Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and then Malaysia's Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin.

The editorial hoped that the meeting between Dr Mahathir and Goh could provide a fresh start to resolving the dispute and move on.

"The truth is that both countries have much to gain from close cooperation based on the clear acceptance of each other as sovereign and equal. It makes better sense than carrying on as neighbours - a geographic reality neither can change - locked in perpetual squabble," it concluded.

-- BERNAMA

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