

14 FEB 1998

Mahathir-Singapore

MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE TO DISCUSS BETTER RELATIONS, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, 14 Feb (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he will discuss with his Singaporean counterpart Goh Chok Tong on "better relations" between the two countries when the two leaders meet here on Monday.

"We just want to discuss how to get over all these problems we have and to have better relations," he told reporters who asked him about the meeting, at a Hari Raya gathering organised by the Sultan Abdul Hamid College Old Boys Association (SAHOCA) here.

Goh is arriving on Monday morning for a two-day working visit and his third meeting with Dr Mahathir in a month.

In an interview with the Singapore Straits Times published today, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia and Singapore could resolve many of their bilateral problems if both countries could be flexible.

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

In the interview, 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.

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

The report also quoted Dr Mahathir as saying that 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 Keretapi Tanah Malaysia Bhd 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, said the report.

A Foreign Ministry statement yesterday said while the focus of the discussions between Dr Mahathir and Goh would be on the financial and economic situation in the region and efforts to enhance intra-Asean trade and promote the use of regional currencies, bilateral matters were also expected to feature prominently in the discussions between the two leaders.

At the Hari Raya gathering, the Prime Minister took the opportunity to meet old friends and his teachers.

Dr Mahathir, who is SAHOCA president, graduated from the college in 1946.

His father, Mohamad Iskandar, was its first headmaster. The college will celebrate its 90th anniversary this year.

Among those present was Malaysia Airlines chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli who is the chairman of SAHOCA. -- BERNAMA

AFY sk