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Abdullah-Singapore

MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE TIES CAN NORMALISE, SAYS ABDULLAH

JOHOR BAHRU, Nov 8 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today the strained ties between Malaysia and Singapore can return to normal following Thursday's "four-eyed" meeting between the prime ministers of the two countries.

He said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Goh Chok Tong had reached an understanding on several issues involving the two neighbouring countries.

"The meeting will pave the way for improved bilateral relations between the two countries," he told reporters after launching the "Tunas Budiman" magazine published by the Education Bureau of the Johor Baharu Umno division, here.

During bilateral talks at the KL International Airport's Bunga Raya room, the two leaders agreed to set aside the differences between their countries and work towards improving bilateral ties.

Among others, Singapore agreed to cooperate in finding ways to help raise funds for Malaysia in the republic while Malaysia gave an assurance to help meet Singapore's water requirements.

Ties between Malaysia and Singapore strained in recent months over several issues, including Malaysia's refusal to relocate its Customs, Immigration and Quarantine checkpoint to Woodlands from Tanjong Pagar.

Comments about past Malaysian leaders in the recently published memoirs of former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew worsened the situation.

Asked to comment on the call by Philippine Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado for a stronger US presence in his country owing to the overlapping claims between China and the Philippines for the Spratly Islands, Abdullah said it was the stand of the Philippine government on that issue.

" We know the US and the Philippines have close ties but cooperation between Asean-member countries is crucial for the security and stability of this region," he said.

He said Asean countries had reached an understanding not to resort to actions that could create a tensed situation in the region such as the use of the military with regards to the overlapping claims for the oil-rich Spratlys.

"Instead, the nine-member regional grouping preferred to resolve issues among them through peaceful negotiations," he said.

The region's stability could be guaranteed through mutual respect and understanding and non-interference in the internal affairs of member and friendly nations, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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