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Senior Malaysian, Singaporean officials to hold talks soon

IPOH, Sun. - Senior officials from Malaysia and Singapore will soon hold discussions to resolve the outstanding issues which had put a strain on bilateral relations.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said they had been given several guidelines on how to resolve the problems.

The senior officials have been entrusted to solve the problems by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Singaporean counterpart, Goh Chok Tong, after the two met for bilateral discussions in Hanoi on Wednesday.

Abdullah said both Prime Ministers had reached an understanding to resolve outstanding issues so that bilateral relations could continue smoothly.

Speaking after attending the Ipoh Barat Umno division family gathering last night, Abdullah said the discussions between the two leaders had brought about better understanding on all the issues.

Dr Mahathir had proposed to Singapore that all outstanding issues be discussed as a package.

These included the future of Malaysia's railway in Singapore, the over-the-counter Central Limit Order Book where Malaysian shares can no longer be traded and the Central Provident Fund's refusal to allow Malaysians from the peninsula who are no longer working in Singapore to withdraw their savings.

Dr Mahathir had also discussed with Goh on Malaysia's Customs, Immigration and Quarantine facilities in Tanjung Pagar which Singapore wanted moved to Woodlands and the rights of Singapore aircraft to enter Malaysian air space.

The discussions also saw Malaysia giving an undertaking that it would continue to supply water to the republic even after the Water Supply Agreement expires in 2061.

On Goh's statement that the outstanding issues could be solved if the officials took a balanced approach, Abdullah said it was hoped that the discussions would benefit both parties.

"Naturally both parties want to ensure a compromise is reached."

On whether there was a need to recall Malaysian students in Baghdad in view of the military strikes against Iraq, Abdullah said so far there had been no requests for help.

There are 33 Malaysian students in Baghdad.

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