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Singapore-Malaysia

SINGAPORE WANTS RELATIONS WITH MALAYSIA BACK TO NORMAL

SINGAPORE, Nov 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said today Singapore wants to put its relations with Malaysia back on keel.

Singapore wanted good relations with Malaysia and it was not in the interest of either country to have poor relations, he told reporters after attending the People's Action Party's (PAP) Community Day, here.

He was commenting on recent reports quoting Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying that bilateral ties had taken a turn for the better.

Goh agreed and said that the two countries were cooling down from a period when relations were a little tense.

Goh, who will be meeting Dr Mahathir before the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) meeting in Kuala Lumpur this month, said he sensed that both sides wanted to get back on keel.

On Dr Mahathir's comment that they both had a sound relationship, Goh said: "Yes, we have no problem at a personal level. But he has got to look after Malaysia's interest, I have to look at Singapore's interest. On a personal level we get on very fine,"

Bilateral ties between the two countries have been strained in recent months over several issues including the location of Malaysia's rail, immigration and customs facilities at the Tanjong Pagar railway station, the request for more water supply from Malaysia and the status of pension saving of peninsular Malaysians working in Singapore.

Malaysia has another one-and-a-half months to present its legal argument to maintain its rail, immigration and customs facilities at Tanjong Pagar after asking Singapore for more time following the expiry of the deadline yesterday.

Singapore moved its customs, immigration and quarantine centre from Tanjong Pagar to Woodlands last July but Malaysia refused to do so,

Goh and Dr Mahathir last held a warm bilateral meeting when Goh visited Malaysia in February.

Goh also said that he would discuss Asean matters with Dr Mahathir during their meeting this month.

"I think Asean is going through a crisis because of the economic crisis, and if Asean is not keen to work together as a cohesive unit, Asean will lose some stature internationally," he said.

He said he would discuss how Asean leaders could make the regional grouping more cohesive and retain its influence at the Asean summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, next month.

-- BERNAMA

TCL JK