

03 AUG 1998

Youth - Singapore

UMNO YOUTH CALLS FOR SUSPENSION OF FRESH BILATERAL MATTERS

KOTA TINGGI, Aug 3 (Bernama) -- The Umno Youth today proposed that Malaysia suspend all fresh bilateral dealings with Singapore until the republic states its official stand on outstanding issues with Malaysia.

The movement said Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong should state his government's official stand on the issues based on Goh's earlier agreement and understanding with his Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the movement has all along maintained that statements by the Singapore foreign affairs and home affairs ministers did not reflect Singapore's sincere stand.

As such it called on Goh to state Singapore's official stand on outstanding issues in Malaysia-Singapore bilateral ties, said Ahmad Zahid reading out a prepared statement at a press conference at Bandar Tenggara near here.

Ahmad Zahid had earlier attended the launching of Projek Tunas Bestari by Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak there.

As for water supply to Singapore, Ahmad Zahid said Umno Youth would want Malaysia, upon expiry of the existing water supply agreements in 2011 and 2061, to only supply processed and not untreated water to Singapore, unlike now.

He said Umno Youth would want that, during coming negotiations on the matter, the government fix a time-frame for water supply and more realistic rates than the present so that subsequent agreements would not be too binding on future generations.

Umno Youth would like to see this factor be given serious consideration more so in the light of the country itself facing water shortage to cater for the needs of Malaysians, he said.

The movement would impress on Singaporeans that Malaysia, in upholding the principles of neighbourliness, would always preserve the value of friendship between the two countries.

"Umno Youth maintains that the issue of water supply to Singapore has never at all been capitalised upon to pressure Singapore. In fact, even before we've been supplying raw water not for profits but because we appreciate that water is a basic necessity. As a neighbour we're mindful of the other neighbour's limitations.

"We would have to look at today's issue for the well-being, prosperity and harmony of future generations. Whatever action is taken today will have an impact on the future generations of both countries," he said.

Also present at the press conference were Umno Youth deputy chief Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein and the movement's chief for Johor Hasni Mohammad.

Ahmad Zahid said the movement urged the government to remain firm in its stand on bilateral issues with Singapore especially those relating to Malaysia's dignity and national integrity.

Umno Youth would remain solidly behind Dr Mahathir in his stewardship of the nation in dealing with such issues, he said.

The movement urged that issues be resolved sincerely, responsibly and with wisdom, in line with agreement reached between Dr Mahathir and Goh during their meeting early this year in which Malaysia displayed sincerity in seeking settlement to outstanding issues, he said.

The six issues which both leaders agreed to resolve were economic and financial cooperation, water supply to Singapore, Malayan Railway land in

Singapore, the claim over Pulau Batu Putih, cooperation in tourism and the establishment of a Malaysia-Singapore business council.

Umno Youth believed that issues such as the relocation of the customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) checkpoint from Tanjong Pagar to Woodlands, the supply of untreated water, Singapore media reports on the KL International Airport (KLIA), the Pasir Gudang port, Malaysian workers' contributions to the republic's Central Provident Fund, Malayan Railway land, Pulau Batu Putih, and offer of high interest rates in Singapore would have to be resolved after thorough scrutiny.

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"We would have to separate one issue from another. Settlement through the official government-to-government channel is the better way out at this point of time," said Ahmad Zahid.

However, he said, Umno Youth would still urge the government to continue maintaining a firm stand in whatever negotiations with Singapore to protect Malaysia's rights.

"Although Malaysia and Singapore are two separate nations, the fact remains that we have had a unique relationship for a very long time. The unique ties exist because of common historical, geographical and cultural factors," he said.

According to him, even all this while Malaysia has always accorded Singapore preferential treatment and extraordinarily special consideration when an issue arose.

Ahmad Zahid said Umno Youth also expressed displeasure over Singapore's attitude, actions and continuous efforts to harp on the past, citing the republic's "National Education Exhibition - The Singapore Story", as a case in point.

He said the movement viewed the exhibition as Singapore's ploy to harp on the negative aspects of Malaysia-Singapore historical ties according to Singapore's own interpretations and solely for its satisfaction without considering Malaysia's feelings.

Ahmad Zahid said Umno Youth respected Singapore's sovereignty but cautioned that the special consideration for the republic has limits.

"Umno Youth will not hesitate to act as there's no longer a need for us in Malaysia to think about continuing on with Malaysia's unique ties with Singapore if the Singapore side never regards us as their unique neighbour.

The special treatment accorded Singapore is just in vain if the response only hurts," he said.

Regional ties are not a win-lose game to suit the political stability of one country alone, he said.

"We have sincerely opened up the communication channels with second-echelon leaders of East Asian countries.

"Only with an open mind and high-level of maturity and by no longer carrying the historical burden of the previous generation, can we be confident of realising a regional union," he said.

Ahmad Zahid said even if it could not rely on Singapore towards that end, Umno Youth would still lean especially on Brunei, the Philippines, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam to help realise that aspiration.

According to him, Umno Youth was confident Malaysia would continue to give due attention to other priorities by concentrating on national visions by year 2020 and not by reflecting back on 1965.

"Under Dr Mahathir's leadership, Malaysians of various communities and positions will prepare themselves and focus more on the future without neglecting traditional, cultural and past events in our history.

"Umno Youth reminds anyone discrediting and belittling us now should remember that when the Malaysian economy recovers later we shall recall who are our friends and foes in times of trouble," he said.

According to Ahmad Zahid, inciting anti-Malaysia sentiments and manipulating issues for unilateral interests at a time when the regional economy was under siege was an irresponsible and unwise act.

He said Singapore should be mindful that " it is not an invincible island in the middle of a destructive sea when it is in fact part of the destructive forces".

Parties deliberately out to undermine the existing relationship would only exacerbate the situation and not doing anyone any good, including Singapore itself, Ahmad Zahid added.

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