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Syed Hamid-dispute

KEEP SENSITIVE ISSUES OUTSIDE PUBLIC DOMAIN, SAYS SYED HAMID

SINGAPORE, Feb 22 (Bernama) -- Sensitive issues which can create tension between Malaysia and Singapore should be kept outside the public domain as far as possible, said Malaysia's Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

He said this form of quiet diplomacy would enable the points of contention to be resolved speedily by both sides.

"What is considered as sensitive and can be misunderstood and create tension should be kept outside the public domain. Outside the polemic of pure rhetoric," the Straits Times newspaper quoted him as saying in an interview.

Over the past 24 months, rough patches in bilateral relations have received extensive coverage in the media on both sides of the Causeway.

Disputes over the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) facilities in Tanjong Pagar, alleged intrusions of Republic of Singapore Air Force aircraft into Malaysian airspace and withdrawal of Central Provident Fund contributions of West Malaysians have been discussed publicly.

However, Syed Hamid admitted that at times, the governments would not be able to keep sensitive issues out of the public domain.

If that happened, he said, there would be full-scale reporting and a ventilation of public feelings.

"The questions which needed to be asked by both governments then would be: How do we manage the situation? Should we overreact? Should demands be made?," he said.

Syed Hamid said even when an issue was being discussed robustly, the diplomatic channel must always be kept open.

Syed Hamid also said there was a clear desire by Malaysia and Singapore to resolve outstanding issues which have plagued bilateral relations in recent times.

"We are positive about wanting to achieve a settlement of matters to the satisfaction of both sides," the newspaper quoted him as saying.

He said that his confidence in the current state of bilateral ties was based on the environment created by the three meetings between Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and his Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad since November last year.

In November Goh was invited by Dr Mahathir for a meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Both leaders also met on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit, held in the Malaysian capital, and a month later, they discussed bilateral matters at the Sixth Asean Summit in Hanoi.

Syed Hamid also hoped that Malaysia's ties with Singapore would not be "dispute-oriented" as there had been too much emphasis on differences between the two neighbours.

"Both countries had cooperated in many fields, had strong people-to-people ties and a historical link. I would like to think of the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore as a continuous process," he added.

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