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Syed Hamid-Singapore

MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE TO FOCUS ON LONG TERM BILATERAL TIES

By: Tham Choy Lin

SINGAPORE, July 12 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Singapore will place priority on bilateral relationship for the long term and will not allow temporary hiccups to jeopardise their longstanding ties, said Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar.

"We will build on common factors rather than look at differences. We want to build on the positives than be reactionary to short-term problems that may occur from time to time," he told newsmen.

Syed Hamid arrived here this morning for a two-day official visit, his first since becoming foreign minister. He called on Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and also met his counterpart S.Jayakumar.

Syed Hamid said the two countries would continue to work to resolve a package of outstanding bilateral issues but would not set a time frame.

"We will find an agreement but we are still a long way from one. The cornerstone of the package is the water issue and once this is resolved, everything else would fall into place," he said.

Singapore is seeking a new water agreement from Malaysia after the expiry of existing contracts in 2011 and 2061.

The other issues in the package are;

- * the location of Malaysian customs, immigration and quarantine facilities at the Tanjong Pagar train station here;
- * the use of Malaysian airspace by the republic's air force; and
- * the pension savings of peninsular Malaysians working in Singapore.

"We will not solve each individually or separately. So there will only be an agreement if we can agree to all the contents of the package," he said adding that both sides knew that it would not be an easy task.

Malaysian and Singapore officials have met three times on the package so far and are expected to meet again in August.

Syed Hamid said his meetings with Goh and Jayakumar were warm but they did not discuss the controversy over the frozen Malaysian shares formerly traded over Singapore's Central-Limit-Order-Book (Clob) exchange as it was a private sector affair.

On recent accusations from both sides of the Causeway that the media of the two countries were meddling in each other's internal affairs, Syed Hamid said it was up to the media to understand and be sensitive to matters pertaining foreign relations.

An editorial by Singapore's Business Times questioning the tenure of Malaysia's Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad caused an outrage while the Malaysian media was slammed by Singapore for "distorted" reports on the redevelopment of the Istana Kampung Glam here into a Malay Heritage Centre.

Syed Hamid said as far as the Malaysian government was concerned, Istana Kampung Glam was not an issue and but it was a matter of public interest because several of the families involved were Malaysian citizens.

He said Singapore had responded because it considered the reports were inaccurate.

A Singapore Foreign Ministry spokesman said Jayakumar and Syed Hamid agreed that it was important that the "two foreign ministries continue to maintain channels of communication" to manage and resolve any bilateral difficulties that occur from time to time.

On the package of outstanding issues, the spokesman said the two ministers "agreed that both sides should try to narrow the gaps so as to

arrive at a win-win package deal."

Jayakumar also briefed Syed Hamid on the upcoming Asean Ministerial Meeting to be held here later this month.

The ministerial meeting would be followed by the Asean Regional Forum and the Post Ministerial Conference.

While here, Syed Hamid also met and exchanged views with about 200 Malaysians working in the republic.

-- BERNAMA

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