

21 JAN 1999

Hamid-Singapore

MALAYSIA MAINTAINS CIQ ISSUE SHOULD BE RESOLVED AS A PACKAGE

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today maintained its stand that all outstanding issues with Singapore, including the dispute over the Tanjong Pagar Immigration, be settled as a package as agreed on earlier by both countries.

Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar said today the question of Malaysia disputing Singapore's sovereignty and the setting of pre-conditions over the dispute did not arise.

"Our position is quite clear. It is not a question of Singapore giving one month or two months or three months (to submit arguments)," he told reporters at his residence, here.

The minister was referring to his Singapore counterpart S.Jayakumar's statement yesterday that Singapore had given Malaysia a month "from the end of Ramadan" to produce its legal arguments to operate its customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) facilities at the Tanjong Pagar rail station in the republic.

Syed Hamid said Kuala Lumpur's position on the dispute was in accordance with the agreement reached by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Singapore counterpart Goh Chok Tong during a meeting on the sidelines of the Sixth Asean Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, last month.

The two leaders had agreed then that all bilateral issues, including water supply to the republic, would be settled as a package.

The dispute over the CIQ facilities took a new twist when Jayakumar told the Singapore Parliament yesterday that Malaysia must recognise Singapore's sovereignty over the Tanjong Pagar issue first before the two countries could proceed to resolve all outstanding bilateral issues as a package.

Jayakumar said Singapore had informed Malaysia that if it did not produce its legal arguments in one month, Singapore would assume that it no longer wished to pursue its legal claim to remain at Tanjong Pagar.

He said Singapore could not proceed to the negotiating table to resolve the package of outstanding issues agreed upon by the prime ministers of the two countries last month without the acknowledgement of Singapore's sovereignty over the CIQ matter.

Jayakumar said Singapore's position was that Malaysia's CIQ facilities in Tanjong Pagar were not based on legal or extra-territorial rights but were at the "leave and consent of the Singapore government".

The CIQ controversy broke out last August when Singapore shifted its CIQ facilities from the Tanjong Pagar station to its northern Woodlands checkpoint on Aug 1, while Malaysia's immigration continues to operate from there.

The rail service has been managed by Malaysia's KTM Berhad since it began in the 1920s under British colonial rule.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia had never disputed Singapore's sovereignty.

"The fact that we are staying in that place (to operate our CIQ in Tanjong Pagar) doesn't mean that we are having territorial claim over that property. We have no claim whatsoever on that property.

"We are not saying that Singapore has no sovereignty. It was never an issue," he said.

He said Malaysia had been operating its CIQ facilities at Tanjong Pagar according to Singapore laws. "In this case, the government of Malaysia has

been operating not now, but since the time of the British," he said.

Syed Hamid said he would respond to Jayakumar's letter to him on the issue but did not say whether he would be meeting Jayakumar.

He said that as had been decided by the two countries, Malaysian and Singapore officials would discuss the matter after Hari Raya.

"Let the officials sit down and resolve all the issues," he said.

The minister also said that there was no need for the matter to be referred to the International Court Of Justice (IJC) in The Hague, Netherlands, as it was not a territorial dispute.

Jayakumar was quoted as saying that the dispute could not be taken to the ICJ "unless both governments agree".

Syed Hamid also referred to Goh's statement that all bilateral issues should be resolved in a manner that would result in a win-win situation for both countries. "This is what we are trying to focus our position on," he said.

"I want it to be understood that here, we want to move from a position of confrontation between the two countries, to a position that we want to find solutions," Syed Hamid added.

-- BERNAMA

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