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Syed Hamid-Singapore

OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS M'SIA-S'PORE BILATERAL ISSUES

KOTA TINGGI, March 12 (Bernama) -- Malaysian and Singapore officials will meet this month as part of efforts to resolve bilateral issues in a package, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said.

"The faster it (discussion) can be held, the better," he told reporters after simultaneously opening the general meetings of Umno Youth and Wanita branches in Kota Tinggi in Tanjung Sedili, near here, yesterday.

Syed Hamid, who is Kota Tinggi Umno Division chief, said the ministry's secretary-general would lead the Malaysian delegation for all officials level meetings with Singapore.

"It is up to the officials. Let the officials discuss whatever is necessary...only then we will know what can be decided. If there is anything (problems), they will report to the ministerial level," said Syed Hamid.

Last month, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong was reported as saying that Singapore was waiting for Malaysia's decision to fix a suitable date to begin talks aimed at settling bilateral issues in a package.

Syed Hamid said as it is both countries had to stick to the matters decided by their prime ministers in Hanoi last year.

At the Asean summit in Hanoi last December, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Goh agreed to discuss and resolve all bilateral issues in a package.

The diplomatic tiff started last July when Singapore told Malaysia that Kuala Lumpur had no legal right to operate the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) centre at the Tanjong Pagar railway station after Singapore moved its facilities to Woodlands.

Other issues involved alleged intrusions on Malaysian airspace by Singapore air force jets and problems faced by those in peninsular Malaysia wishing to withdraw their Central Provident Fund (CPF) money.

Asked if he was confident the issues could be resolved this year, Syed Hamid said: "I cannot answer based on a hypothetical situation. I want the issues to be settled as soon as possible so that we can move on to other things."

He said there should not be pressure from any party in seeking a solution.

"The important thing is that there is a desire to seek settlement. Let it be discussed in a calm manner without being brought into the public domain," he said.

-- BERNAMA

MKO YBY