

We are ready to compromise if S'pore is willing to: Dr M

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By OUR REPORTER

MALAYSIA is ready to compromise with Singapore to resolve bilateral issues if the republic is also willing to do so, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"Issues get difficult to resolve if we are the ones who have to compromise each time.

"(They) want Malaysia to compromise but the other party refuses to compromise ... it's a little difficult," Dr Mahathir told a press conference after launching the Port of Tanjung Pelepas 2000 Conference and Exhibition in Johor Baru yesterday.

He was asked to comment on several issues affecting bilateral ties including land belonging to KTM Bhd in Tanjung Pagar, the sale of water to the republic and the Singapore Central Provident Fund (CPF) withdrawals.

Dr Mahathir said Singapore should agree to the issue of the KTM Bhd land in Tanjong Pagar be resolved as a package and not separately.

"It is a problem that has a lot of ramifications with other bilateral issues. It is not a simple isolated issue," he said.

The Singapore Government wants the Tanjung Pagar railway station to be moved either to Bukit Timah first or straight to Woodlands.

Singapore's Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar was reported by Straits Times last week as saying that the Points of Agreement between Malaysia and Singapore on railway land will expire in less than a year.

Dr Mahathir expressed hope that the matter would be resolved within a year as stipulated under the Points of Agreement. "I do not know whether it will be resolved in one year but I hope it will. We will see when we come to that (if the issue cannot be solved in a year)," he said.

He also refuted Singapore's claim that the Umno elections are disrupting negotiations on a package of issues involving the two countries including the CPF issue. "If the election is the cause of the deadlock, the CPF issue would have long been settled. We are not delaying the matter deliberately," he added.

He described the CPF issue as a "simple problem", saying that "all we ask of them is that when our people stop working there, they can take their CPF money back.

"This is also our practice; when Singaporeans who work in Malaysia return to their country, they can take their money."

"The same with Malaysians from Sabah and Sarawak who worked in Singapore ... but what we do not understand is why can't Malaysians from the Peninsula do the same," he said.