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Singapore-Malaysia

GOH-MAHATHIR MEETING MAY SET DIRECTION FOR OUTSTANDING ISSUES

SINGAPORE, Jan 17 (Bernama) -- A meeting, proposed between Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and his Malaysian counterpart, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, may yield "certain directions" for discussions over the package of outstanding issues between the two countries, Singapore Foreign Minister S.Jayakumar said today.

"When exactly such a meeting will take place, I do not know, and also I do not wish to predict the substantive outcome of such a meeting.

"But I would anticipate that when the two prime ministers do meet, one possibility is that they may give certain directions to the officials on the whole question of the package discussions," Jayakumar told Parliament.

Goh said recently that he hoped to meet Dr Mahathir after the Chinese New Year to discuss the outstanding bilateral matters that included a new water agreement for Singapore and the status of Malaysian-owned railway land in the island-state.

Dr Mahathir said he was prepared to meet Goh. The two leaders had agreed in December 1998, on the sidelines of the Asean summit in Hanoi, to work out a series of outstanding bilateral issues as a package.

The Chinese New Year is celebrated on Feb 5 and 6.

Officials from the two countries have met three times between March and May last year. The fourth meeting is to be hosted by Malaysia.

Jayakumar also said that despite the "cyclical ups and downs", bilateral relations on the whole had been maintained.

Apart from the water agreement and railway land issues, the package for discussion also covered the ban on the use of Malaysian airspace for Singapore's Air Force, pension savings of West Malaysians held by Singapore's Central Provident Fund (CPF) and the location of a Malaysian immigration and customs checkpoint in the Malaysia-owned railway station in the island-state.

Asked by a Member of Parliament if there were too many issues in the package, Jayakumar said Goh and Dr Mahathir had agreed to look at them as a package because the previous approach of treating them separately had not produced results.

-- BERNAMA

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