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Mahathir-Compromise

M'SIA READY TO COMPROMISE WITH S'PORE, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

JOHOR BAHRU, March 13 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia is ready to compromise with Singapore in seeking solutions to bilateral issues if the republic is also prepared to do the same.

"Issues get difficult to be resolved if we are the ones who have to compromise each time," he told a news conference after opening the Port of Tanjung Pelepas conference and exhibition 2000, here.

"(They) want Malaysia to compromise but the other party refuses to compromise...it's a little difficult," he said.

The prime minister was asked to comment on several issues affecting bilateral ties between Malaysia and Singapore including the questions of the Central Provident Fund (CPF), water supply and land belonging to Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd (KTM Bhd) in Tanjung Pagar.

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

Asked to comment on Singapore newspaper reports recently that KTM Bhd has a year from now to move out from Tanjung Pagar, he said that the matter was being discussed by both countries.

"I do not know whether it could be resolved within a one-year period or not...I hope it could be resolved," he said.

However, he said that the solution to the issue also involves other matters affecting bilateral ties and as such the KTM Bhd land issue had to be resolved as a package.

Asked what will happen if the KTM Bhd land issue is not settled within the one-year period, Dr Mahathir said: "We'll see when the time comes because I cannot predict what will happen".

The prime minister also said that the Umno election in May was not related to the delay in seeking a solution to matters affecting bilateral ties.

Last week, Singapore Foreign Minister Prof S.Jayakumar was reported to have said that the delay in seeking a solution to matters affecting bilateral ties like the water supply, KTM Bhd land and CPF issues was because Malaysia was busy with the Umno election.

"The (Umno) election has nothing to do with it," the prime minister said.

Asked regarding the CPF, Dr Mahathir said that the problem only concerned approval for the withdrawal of funds from the CPF by Malaysians from the peninsula no longer working in Singapore.

"This is also our practice. When a Singaporean cease to work in Malaysia, he can withdraw his money. Malaysians from Sabah and Sarawak working in Singapore, when they cease working, they can withdraw their money. We are puzzled why those from the peninsula cannot do so," he said.

Asked whether the republic has a motive in refusing to allow the withdrawal of funds for those from the peninsula, Dr Mahathir said: "I cannot read people's mind. I can only read into what has been said".

During the Asean summit in Hanoi in December 1998, Dr Mahathir and his Singapore counterpart, Goh Chok Tong, agreed to discuss and resolve bilateral issues as a package.

A political dispute erupted in July 1998 when Singapore told Malaysia that Kuala Lumpur has no legal right over the operations of the customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) checkpoint at the Tanjung Pagar railway

station following Singapore's move to shift such facilities to Woodlands.

The two countries were also involved in disputes over allegations of encroachment of Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) aircraft into Malaysian air space and the withdrawal of funds from the CPF by Malaysians in the peninsula.

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