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Syed Hamid: Kuan Yew's visit to strengthen relations

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Any progress made towards resolving outstanding issues between Malaysia and Singapore from the visit of Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew would be welcomed, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

Although it was an informal one, he said, it provided the opportunity for strengthening of relations between Lee and Malaysian leaders.

Among the issues are the sale of water to Singapore, the Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd land in the republic and the Central Provident Fund withdrawals by Malaysians working in Singapore.

Syed Hamid said there would not be any fixed agenda in Lee's meetings with leaders here.

"They want to have an open discussion, so we leave it at that ... and if at any time we achieve something, we should welcome that.

"I am sure the leaders would be able to talk frankly and openly," he said after welcoming the Senior Minister upon his arrival by road from Singapore at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel at 4.45pm.

Lee is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi separately tomorrow.

During his four-day stay, he would, among others, visit the Petronas Twin Towers, the Federal administrative centre in Putrajaya and the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang.

Syed Hamid expressed confidence that Dr Mahathir and Lee would have a useful and productive discussion.

On the significance of Lee's visit, he said it should be noted that it was his first in 10 years.

"He wanted to come after a long absence... he wanted to have a feel of the changes taking place in Malaysia.

"Therefore, his visit has been arranged in such a way to enable him to meet the people and see the country," he said.

Syed Hamid said Lee's decision to travel by road and not by air reflected his desire to see for himself the development and changes that had taken place in Malaysia.

"He has been getting news about the country from reports. So now he wants to see for himself."

On whether Malaysia regarded Lee's visit as Singapore's gesture of goodwill, Syed Hamid said as neighbours, there was always a need for both countries to renew their relationship.

Tonight, Lee held an informal meeting with Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin lasting about half-an-hour, here.

Daim had called on Lee at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel for the meeting before adjourning for dinner.

Other VIPs who attended the dinner included former Penang Chief Minister Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu, former Foreign Ministers Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie and Tengku Tan Sri Ahmad Rithauddeen, former Health Minister Tan Sri Chong Hon Nyan and the country's former special envoy to the United Nations, Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad.

Earlier, in Malacca, Lee and his wife Kwa Geok Choo arrived at the A' Famosa Resort in Alor Gajah for a 30-minute stopover.

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