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`We won't bow to demands'

reports on "Dewan Rakyat" by Ramlan Said; Ainon Mohd; Hayati Hayatudin  
MALAYSIA will not compromise nor bow to any demands by Singapore to end  
any outstanding bilateral issues between the two countries.

Speaking on behalf of the Foreign Ministry, Entrepreneur Development  
Minister Datuk Mohd Nazri Aziz said Malaysia had put forward its views and  
proposals on a package deal with Singapore but it will not give in to any  
of its demands.

He said negotiations on outstanding bilateral issues would remain  
stalemated unless Singapore is willing to compromise.

"We have yet to come to any agreement on the package. It is only  
'normal' for Singapore to look for other issues to delay the negotiations  
until we (Malaysia) finally agree with their demand on the supply of raw  
water to the country."

The package, among other things, involves Central Provident Fund  
withdrawals and the land owned by Malayan Railway in Singapore.

However, negotiations between the two countries had stalled since May.

Singapore got a ticking off from the MPs who raised issues on the status  
of Malaysia-Singapore relationship after the Singapore Straits Times ran a  
column on March 25 which criticised Malaysia as the only democratic  
government in Asia that did not have a leadership change in the last  
decade.

Many of the MPs had voiced their dissatisfaction on the matter and asked  
the Government to review the relationship between the two countries as  
they claimed that Singapore had all the while been very "insensitive"  
towards Malaysia.

Among those who spoke on the issue were Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Mohd Jarjis  
(BN-Rompin), Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (BN-Bagan Datoh), Datuk Muhamad Aziz  
(BN-Sri Gading), Bung Mokhtar Radin (BN-Kinabatangan), Datuk Mohd Ali  
Hassan (BN-Tebrau) and Lim Hock Seng (DAP-Bagan).

Their full support for the Government was evident, like the call made by  
Mohd Ali who wanted the Government to be firm in resolving the issues. He  
also suggested that a firm warning be given to Singapore, if necessary.

Winding up the debate on the Supply Bill 2000 at the committee stage for  
the Finance Ministry, Nazri said the republic's action on the CPF  
withdrawals clearly showed their unwillingness to compromise on the issue.

He said even though Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, during a  
1998 bilateral meeting in Hanoi with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir  
Mohamad, had agreed to address the issue in two years, both countries have  
not yet come to terms.

"In this issue, we are not happy with the conditions set by the  
Singapore Government. Why did they impose conditions only on workers in  
Peninsular Malaysia while those in Sabah and Sarawak are not affected?"

He said investigations by the Ministry showed that Singapore did not  
apply or impose similar conditions on other countries like Indonesia and  
Thailand.

"What is their rationale behind this move and why did they pick on  
Malaysia, not other Asean countries?"

On the status of the negotiations, Nazri said officials from both  
countries had met three times following the agreement by leaders of both  
countries to discuss outstanding issues as a package.

"No solution was found to resolve the issues. Even if there are meetings  
between officials from both countries... that is on the surface only.

"We know for a fact that Singapore will continue to look for other issues to delay the negotiations until we bow to their wishes."

Nazri said that during the meeting of both leaders, Goh had stated that Singapore was willing to relax the CPF conditions to enable the workers to take out their savings.

However, he said, Singapore would only agree to this condition after both countries have resolved the outstanding issues in the package.

"They want us to come to an agreement and settle the issues first; then only will they let the workers take their money. Why did they have to use this issue as a leverage to get what they want?"

However, Nazri said any dispute or dissatisfaction between the two countries must be solved through dialogue. He said Malaysia would set an appropriate time to enable both countries to discuss the matter and come to an agreement.

"This is not something that cannot be solved."

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