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Kuan Yew's visit may help sort out bilateral issues

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PETALING JAYA, Sun. - Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's four-day visit which began today is expected to help ease the thorny issues plaguing bilateral ties between the two countries.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today chances were that five issues, which both sides had earlier agreed to discuss as a package, would be resolved.

These are the sale of water to Singapore; disagreement over the Points of Agreement (POA) for the development of railway land owned by Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd; the status of the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) facilities at Tanjong Pagar; the use of Malaysian airspace by the Singapore Air Force; and, Singapore Central Provident Fund (CPF) withdrawals by Peninsular Malaysians who had worked in the republic.

"Discussions showed that both sides are keen to find solutions to the problems.

"We hope this visit will help patch up whatever differences between us and bring us closer towards a permanent solution."

Syed Hamid was speaking at Wisma Putra's Family Day at Sunway Lagoon.

The Foreign Minister said previous talks had come to a dead-end because of strong opinions held by both sides.

"But this time around, Singapore is more willing to discuss proposals that we have brought up and we are also ready to hear their views."

Syed Hamid said on the CPF issue, for example, Malaysia wants Peninsular Malaysians be given the same treatment as Sabah and Sarawak folk who were allowed to withdraw their savings when they quit their jobs and returned home.

"However, we cannot solve this issue alone. The other issues in the package must be solved together," he added.

The visit will also enable the second generation of leaders accompanying Lee to make contacts with their counterparts here.

Lee is leading a delegation of three Ministers, a Parliamentary Secretary and officials, as a follow-up to his visit in August last year.

Lee and his delegation had a closed-door dinner with 20 business leaders and members of the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute at the Sunway Lagoon Resort today.

Tomorrow, Lee is scheduled to meet Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim.

He will later join Syed Hamid for lunch.

Lee will also attend a dinner hosted by New Straits Times Press (M) Berhad Group Editor-in-Chief Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad.

On Tuesday, Lee will meet Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and members of the Backbenchers Club before paying a courtesy call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at his office in Putrajaya about 4pm.

Lee will meet Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at 5.30pm at his office before attending a dinner hosted by the latter at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel.

On Wednesday, Lee and his delegation will meet a group of former Ministers.