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Malaysia-Singapore

MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE TO DISCUSS NEW LOCATION FOR RAIL STATION

By: Tham Choy Lin

SINGAPORE, Feb 7 (Bernama) -- In a sign of moving forward on a package of outstanding bilateral issues that had stalled over the past year, Malaysia and Singapore have agreed to the relocation of the Tanjung Pagar railway station, owned by Malaysia here, to a new point on the island-state.

The two countries will now look into a proposal from Malaysia to shift the station from Tanjung Pagar to Kranji instead of either Bukit Timah or Woodlands as agreed previously under a Points of Agreement (POA) signed between them in 1990.

Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said after a meeting with Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that Singapore had agreed in principle to the move.

But the two leaders, who held a four-eyed meeting for 45 minutes, steered away from setting a timeframe to resolve the railway issue which is part of the package to be ironed out as had been agreed between Goh and his Malaysian counterpart, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in late 1998.

"We are still at the stage of discussion," said Abdullah, adding that the other issues in the package, including water supply to Singapore, would be worked out as well.

Goh said Dr Mahathir had proposed the shift to Kranji and also the construction of an underground tunnel linking the railway station in Kranji to Malaysia's southern Johor state and had also indicated more time was needed to resolve the matter.

"But there must be finality to the process. In other words, we've agreed they can go to Kranji but we must sooner or later end the discussions, we can't go on forever," he said.

"To put into context, otherwise people may misunderstand again that Malaysia is not giving us, then we get into all kinds of media speculation, there is a genuine reason why Malaysia needs more time," added Goh.

He said time was needed for the two sides to study details of the move from Tanjung Pagar to Kranji to reach an agreement.

On the subject of water supply to Singapore, Abdullah said Malaysia would not deny water supply to the island-state and the two sides needed to sort out the pricing and volume.

"We will not allow the Singapore people to be deprived of water which they need for consumption. This is a stated policy," he said.

The contentious issues in the package also include the use of Malaysian airspace by the Singapore's air force and the withdrawal of pension savings of West Malaysians who had worked in Singapore

The two countries also agreed to enhance contacts between their peoples and would direct their foreign ministries to develop more exchanges between various groups including businessmen and youths.

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