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Malaysia-Singapore

OUTSTANDING ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED ON 'WIN-WIN' BASIS, SAYS SYED HAMID

By: Tham Choy Lin

SINGAPORE, Feb 8 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the resolution of a package of outstanding bilateral issues with Singapore will be on a 'win-win' basis and not at the expense of one side granting concession to the other.

He said like Singapore, Malaysia was keen to come to a settlement of the package, as agreed by the leaders of the two countries, that would satisfy both parties.

"The desire for settlement is not one-sided but on both sides. Malaysia is equally keen to resolve...we want to achieve mutuality.

"It is not a question of one giving concession to the other. This is not the way we discussed. Let us focus on the fact that both parties have agreed that the matters outstanding should have a way of finding a resolution and there must be a finality...it cannot remain outstanding forever," he reporters on the second day of Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's visit here.

Singapore newspapers headlined today that the island-state had extended a Feb 10 deadline to settle the relocation of the Malaysian-owned railway station in Tanjung Pagar here.

The relocation of the Tanjung Pagar railway station comes under a 1990 Points of Agreement (POA) reached between the two countries. But differences have risen over when it comes into effect.

The problem over the railway station was included in a series of outstanding issues to be resolved as a package agreed between Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Singaporean counterpart, Goh Chok Tong, in late 1998.

Syed Hamid said in keeping with the leaders' decision, Malaysia was looking at resolving all the issues as a package and not separately.

"Once the general framework has been agreed, it is not a question of Singapore giving concession or Malaysia delaying it. Malaysia is as much interested as Singapore to have all these matters under the bridge," he added.

Goh told reporters after meeting Abdullah yesterday, that Singapore agreed in principle to Malaysia's proposal to shift the Tanjung Pagar railway station to a new location here, to Kranji instead of Woodlands or Bukit Timah as agreed under the POA.

The proposal include linking the Kranji railway station to Malaysia's southern Johor state via an underground rail tunnel.

Syed Hamid said discussions on the package were on track after Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's visit to Kuala Lumpur last August during which he met Dr Mahathir.

"Things are moving in the right direction. We are already there. If you'd asked me last year about it or two years ago, I would say I do not know how we could because looking at it (then), we were very far.

"But if you ask me now, I think it's nearer to finding a solution because there are specifics...we have already identified the areas, so I would not say it would be in limbo," he said.

The package also includes a crucial new water supply agreement for Singapore, the pension savings of West Malaysians working in Singapore and the use of Malaysian air space by Singapore's air force.

Abdullah reiterated yesterday that Malaysia would continue to supply water to Singapore and details were being sorted out on pricing volume.

Singapore depends on Malaysia for the bulk of its water needs under two contracts that expire in 2011 and 2061.

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