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Singapore-Malaysia

SINGAPORE'S INTEREST CONSIDERED IN DEAL WITH MALAYSIA, SAYS JAYAKUMAR

SINGAPORE, Sept 25 (Bernama) -- Singapore had calculated and taken into account its national interest when it reached a broad agreement with Malaysia earlier this month on a series of outstanding issues, said Foreign Minister S.Jayakumar today.

He said the deal reached between Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was "a compromise made by both sides" and had placed bilateral relations on a "surer footing."

He was answering questions in Parliament on behalf of Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong for an assessment of the agreement and whether Singapore has a fair deal.

Describing the deal as a "psychological breakthrough" given the long-standing contentions, he said it showed both countries recognised the value of cooperation and the stake they had in each other's stability and growth.

"The key question Singaporeans should ask ourselves is this: Are we both better off concluding a deal, or by allowing such outstanding issues to fester?" he said.

Among the key issues are a new water supply agreement for Singapore after 2061 and the relocation of the Malaysian-owned railway station in Tanjung Pagar and the future of the rail land.

Asked why Singapore proposed to pay more for the water and to give 12 additional plots of land in Bukit Timah to Malaysia, Jayakumar said it was to advance the negotiations and considered them as part of the package deal.

"When we agree to various increases, and when we put forward certain proposals, have we made our calculations? I think the House must expect that yes, we do not put forward proposals lightly, we have to take into account what is it that advances our interest," he said.

Jayakumar said he could not give a clear date when the agreement would be signed because "there are really very many details, important details to be sorted out."

But both countries had the desire to resolve it as soon as possible, he said.

He was also asked if there would be any delays or surprises in future given that the two countries had differences over the 1990 Points of Agreement which they had agreed on to redevelop the railway land.

Jayakumar said he hoped it would not happen as both countries needed to put the matters behind them and both face other problems especially after the Sept 11 terrorist attacks in the United States.

He said once formally concluded, Singapore and Malaysia were bound by international law to abide by the terms of the agreement.

Singapore's opposition said it was very happy that the two countries had reached an agreement and viewed it as great progress in bilateral ties.

"Our hope is that before we finally sign the agreement, there is an assurance from Malaysia that Malaysia shall continue to supply raw water to Singapore," said opposition representative Chiam See Tong.

-- BERNAMA

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