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Abdullah-Singapore

SINGAPORE AGREES TO ACCEPT NOTE ON MALAYSIA'S CONCERN

PUTRAJAYA, March 11 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today Singapore has agreed to accept any notes from Malaysia regarding the latter's fears about the possible negative impact of the land reclamation works at Pulau Tekong, bordering Malaysian waters.

Briefing the media after an hour-long meeting with his Singaporean counterpart, Lee Hsien Loong, here, Abdullah said that Lee expressed the republic's willingness if Malaysia has any proof that such activity is detrimental to Malaysia's interests.

"He said that Singapore is prepared to accept a note from Malaysia explaining all matters that are viewed as affecting our stand or the areas bordering Singapore and Malaysia," Abdullah said.

Yesterday, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said that Singapore should not just brush aside fears on the effects of the reclamation works in its waters.

He was replying to an earlier statement by the Singapore Foreign Ministry which appeared to dismiss Malaysia's fears on the negative affects of the reclamation.

Over the past week, the reclamation issue had added to a list of bilateral issues between the two countries with Malaysia voicing fears that Singapore's activities may narrow the waterway that separates the two countries and also affect the ecology and livelihood of fishermen in the area.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said that Kuala Lumpur wanted an assurance from Singapore that the reclamation would not affect the deepest point of the straits which was vital for shipping.

Abdullah said Malaysia had already started surveying the area and would provide any proof to Singapore on the possible effects.

"If there is anything that confirms our fears, we will tell them and they are prepared to accept the note," he said.

Abdullah said that prior to this, Malaysia, through the Foreign Ministry, had sent a note to Singapore stating that the reclamation works had encroached into Malaysian waters but Singapore had rebutted this claim.

He said that at today's meeting, Lee maintained Singapore's stance that the reclamation was within its territorial waters, that it would not affect the ecology and that it was Singapore's right to carry out such activity.

"But I have also specified the points, of the concern of Malaysia of the possible side affects as the result of the reclamation. It may also have some other affects, we don't know," he said.

Asked whether the issue will affect bilateral relations between the two neighbours, Abdullah said: "If we don't manage any issue properly, then it will sour relations. At the moment, I don't believe it has soured relations."

On the sale of water to Singapore, Abdullah said Malaysia had already replied to Singapore on the matter.

He said Malaysia hoped that both sides could have a meeting soon.

"As far as Malaysia is concerned, I think more or less we already have our negotiating position, something which serves as the basis for negotiation," he said.

In January this year, Singapore said that it had asked Malaysia to set out its position on outstanding issues, including water supply, and was

still awaiting a reply.

Both sides have yet to reach a new price for the water which Malaysia had been supplying since the 60s.

Malaysia only charged the republic three sen per thousand gallons (one gallon equals about 4.5 litres) of raw water and had asked for a reasonable price.

Lee is on a three-day visit here at the invitation of Abdullah, who made an official visit to the republic last year.

Later, Lee called on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at his office, here.

-- BERNAMA

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