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S'pore-Batu Puteh

S'PORE TO SIGN PACT WITH M'SIA ON BATU PUTEH IN JANUARY

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 28 (Bernama) -- The Singapore government is looking at January 2003 to sign a Special Agreement with Malaysia to refer the overlapping claims over Batu Puteh to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Singapore Foreign Minister Professor S. Jayakumar said today.

He said: "Our officials will be discussing the dates for the signing."

"We are ready to do so any time," he said replying to questions from the media in Singapore. The transcripts of his remarks were issued by the Singapore High Commission to the local media here today.

He said: "We have to find a window suitable for both Malaysia's Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and me. I believe there is one meeting in January when Syed Hamid and I will attend - perhaps we can sign then."

He said it was absurd to say that Singapore was deliberately delaying the signing of the Special Agreement, and claimed that Singapore was the first to have proposed to resolve the issue peacefully via ICJ, as early as 1989, without adverse effects on bilateral relations.

He also said Singapore shared the same view of Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that international law on territorial disputes must to be respected, and any confrontation should be avoided.

Jayakumar said Singapore wanted to resolve the issue peacefully, without adverse effect on bilateral relations and ready "to kick off the next stage in the ICJ process by signing the special agreement."

He said this in reponse to Malaysia's allegation that Singapore was deliberately delaying the signing of the Special Agreement on Pulau Batu Puteh.

Commenting on reports about Dr Mahathir's recent comments that Malaysia wished to refer the water issue to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), he said: "Singapore would prefer the talks to go on, but covering both current and future water, so that a win-win deal can be worked out."

In this situation, Jayakumar said, if Malaysia wanted to refer the issues to the PCA, then Singapore had not much option but to agree as it was not good to leave this matter unresolved and continue to be a major irritant to bilatreal relations.

He said in referring it to PCA, both countries would be able to clear the impasse so that the two could move on with bilateral relations and work together to deal with many other pressing problems.

Jayakumar said: "Singapore's position is that Malaysia has lost the right of review but is prepared to discuss a revision of present water price in return for an agreement on future water supply.

"But Malaysia insisted that we accept their legal position that they have a right of review and that we should not discuss future water supply.

"With both sides maintaining their positions, it has become difficult to move forward in resolving the water issues.

"We would very much prefer this issue to be resolved by further talks, if that is possible. So even after Malaysia called off the package approach, we said we are prepared to hold talks on the water issue only," he said

However, if Malaysia's view was only to talk on current water and not future water, Singapore could not force them to come to the negotiating table, he said.

-- BERBAMA

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