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Malaysia-Singapore

MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE MEET TO RESOLVE OUTSTANDING ISSUES

PUTRAJAYA, July 1 (Bernama) -- The Foreign Ministers of Malaysia and Singapore today began a meeting to discuss all outstanding issues between their countries and arrive at an amicable settlement.

The two-day meeting, at Wisma Putra, here, would discuss the issues in a single package, consistent with the understanding reached between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Singapore counterpart Goh Chok Tong on the sidelines of the Asean Summit in Hanoi in December 1998.

The issues are the supply of water to Singapore, Malayan Railway land in the republic, the location for the stationing of Malaysian Customs, Immigration and Quarantine officials, withdrawals from the Central Provident Fund by Peninsular Malaysians and the use of Malaysia's air space by the Singapore Air Force.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar in his opening remarks hoped the meeting, being held on the basis of mutual trust, sincerity and commitment, would result in a win-win situation.

"We need to be creative, not with a view to further complicating the already difficult set of issues but to contribute to resolving them," he said.

"We need to be constructive and not inject elements which will derail the very process of reaching a settlement," he said.

Syed Hamid said the satisfactory outcome of the effort from both sides would have a positive impact on Malaysia and Singapore relations for the benefit of the present and future generations.

"Malaysia and Singapore are close neighbours. Our mutual interest demand that we learn to live with each other."

"There is simply too much at stake. Conflict and confrontation will not bring us anywhere," Syed Hamid said.

Singapore Foreign Minister Prof S.Jayakumar expressed the hope that the meeting would enable both sides to identify the areas of agreement and disagreement, find common ground between their respective positions and work towards presenting an overall agreement on the package for endorsement by the Prime Ministers of both countries.

"After all our efforts, in this and future talks, if major differences remain, we will have to refer them to our two Prime Ministers so that they can give their directions accordingly," he said.

Jayakumar said more than three years had passed since the two Prime Ministers met in Hanoi and although officers from both sides had met thrice and Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew had also travelled to Kuala Lumpur twice and held discussions and corresponded with Dr Mahathir, there has not been much progress on the issues.

"Dr Mahathir wrote to Singapore Senior Minister on March 4, 2002 and Goh replied on April 11."

"I believe this latest exchange of letters has established the basic framework for our current negotiations," he said.

Jayakumar said it was important for both sides not to lose sight of the bigger future and so must accommodate each other's interests and strike a deal even as both Malaysia and Singapore promoted their respective national interests.

"We should regard agreement on the package as a way forward of clearing the table of outstanding issues so as to stabilise relations for the long term."

"If we can do so, we will send a strong signal to present and future generations that both sides want a mutually beneficial and enduring relationship, what you referred to as a win-win relationship, and bring Malaysia and Singapore ties forward into a new era of cooperation and development," he said

When Lee was entrusted with the task of holding talks with Dr Mahathir last September, he had announced that Singapore would pay 45 sen per 4,540 litres of raw water up to the year 2061, and 60 sen per 4,540 litres after the year, subject to revision every five years.

Under the 1961 agreement, Singapore can draw 88 millions gallons daily (mgd) from the Pulai catchment area as well as from the Tebrau and Skudai rivers in Johor until August 31, 2011.

The 1962 agreement allows Singapore to draw another 50 mgd from Sungai Johor until Sept 28, 2061.

-- BERNAMA

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