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S'pore wants time to study new proposal on water

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SINGAPORE is currently mulling the details of a new proposal from Malaysia concerning the sale of water to the republic.

The republic's Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had sent the proposal to Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew last week, and that a reply from the latter is being delivered.

"Prime Minister Dr Mahathir wrote to Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew last week containing the new proposal.

"We need some time to study the details as they contain new meaning to the formula on water," Lee said after calling on Dr Mahathir in Putrajaya.

The issue related to the supply of water from Malaysia to Singapore, along with several other matters, has become a thorn in the side of diplomatic relations between both countries.

Discussions of these issues, including the development of railway land owned by KTM Bhd and the status of the Malaysian Customs, Immigration and Quarantine facility at the KTM station in Tanjong Pagar, had stalled in the past mainly because of the republic's disagreement on water pricing.

In his visit to Malaysia in September last year, Senior Minister Lee held discussions with Dr Mahathir on a broad range of issues affecting relations between both countries.

Both countries had agreed to resolve all outstanding issues between them and the details of a final agreement will be signed by the respective Prime Ministers.

On the land reclamation issue, the latest point of contention between Malaysia and Singapore, Lee said the work Singapore is doing is well within its territorial waters.

"Both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister had raised this issue in our meetings," he said.

Singapore's Foreign Ministry had issued a statement reiterating that reclamation work in its Pulau Tekong waters was within its territory, and Malaysia's claims that it would affect shipping in the area was "unfounded".

The son of Senior Minister Lee is on a three-day visit to Malaysia. He is accompanied by members of Parliament Zainudin Nordin, Cedric Foo and Lim Hwee Hua as well as officials from Singapore's Foreign Ministry.

Lee said his discussions with Dr Mahathir also covered bilateral issues.

He added that his visit was to reciprocate a similar visit to Singapore by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi last year. Earlier, Lee held talks with his counterpart in Putrajaya.

Bernama reports: Abdullah said yesterday that Singapore had agreed to accept a protest note from Malaysia if it felt that the reclamation activities had adversely affected the ecology or deep water channel bordering both countries, making it difficult for ships to call at the Pasir Gudang Port in Johor.

Briefing the media after an hour-long meeting with Lee in Putrajaya, Abdullah said Lee had expressed Singapore's willingness to consider evidence that its reclamation work was detrimental to Malaysia's interests.

On Monday, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar had said that Singapore should not just brush aside fears of the negative impact of its reclamation in Malaysian waters.

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