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Seeking end to Singapore issues

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Malaysia and Singapore must reach an amicable settlement for all outstanding issues between them as continued conflicts and confrontations would not be beneficial to both sides.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Kuala Lumpur and Singapore should look at the broader interests of the people and strive to resolve all outstanding issues, once and for all.

"The greatest challenge before us is not to outdo one another. This is not an exercise in one-upmanship. On the contrary, it is to help each other, the ultimate objective of which is to seek what is fair and just for the people of our two countries," Syed Hamid said in his opening remarks at the Malaysia-Singapore ministerial meeting at Wisma Putra today.

Speaking before the Singaporean delegation led by Foreign Affairs Minister Prof S. Jayakumar, Syed Hamid pointed out the need to express mutual trust, sincerity and commitment, with the hope that the two-day meeting would result in a win-win situation.

The meeting 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.

"We need to be creative, not with a view to further complicating the issues but to resolving them.

"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 bilateral relations.

"Our mutual interests demand that we learn to live with each other. There is simply too much at stake. Conflict and confrontation will not take us anywhere," he said.

Jayakumar, meanwhile, expressed hope the meeting would enable both sides to identify the areas of agreement and disagreement, find common ground and work towards presenting an overall agreement on the package for endorsement by the Prime Ministers of both countries.

He said an exchange of letters between Dr Mahathir and Goh had established the basic framework for the current negotiations.

"So I hope at this meeting, we should both try to understand each other's position and views, and address the issues from a long-term perspective to reach a win-win formula.

"We should try to make as much progress as we can. Only a deal that satisfies both sides can form the basis of a durable relationship," he said.

Acknowledging that reaching an amicable solution was not an easy task, Jayakumar was positive that an agreement could be sealed, provided political will and mutual goodwill prevailed.