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Upbeat on solving bilateral issues

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Malaysia is optimistic that outstanding issues with Singapore can be resolved when the foreign ministers of the two countries meet for two days from July 1.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today the contentious issues could be resolved if both sides adopted an open mind.

He said the last letter from Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reflected a desire to resolve them.

"He would like to see the issues resolved and not let hanging and causing problems now and then to bilateral ties," he said when asked to comment on the meeting to be held in Kuala Lumpur.

"There are certain issues that need to be discussed and these should be discussed with the intention of finding a solution.

"They have been outstanding for a long time. We do not want them to be a continuing issue. Therefore, we have to work hard to find a solution."

The package of unresolved issues includes the supply of water to Singapore; disagreements over the Points of Agreement; Customs, Immigration and Quarantine complex status at Tanjung Pagar; the use of Malaysian airspace by the Singapore Air Force; and Singapore Provident Fund withdrawals.

The deadlock over the issues is said to be caused by the failure to compromise.

On the prospect of all issues being ironed out during the two-day meeting, Syed Hamid said: "If we can resolve them by July 2, it is good, otherwise we will have other meetings."

On whether Malaysia would stick to its new asking price for water sold to Singapore, Syed Hamid replied: "We are going to sit down. I don't want to make a conclusion about it as whatever position Malaysia and Singapore have, we will see how we can arrive at a solution."

On the construction of a bridge to replace the Causeway, Syed Hamid said he the republic had not objected to it.

To a question on the Asean Plus 3 (South Korea, Japan and China) secretariat to be based in Kuala Lumpur, he said Malaysia was willing to provide the money to set it up.

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