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Syed Hamid-Water

BALL AT SINGAPORE'S FEET NOW, SAYS SYED HAMID

PUTRAJAYA, July 22 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar today reiterated that the door for negotiation is still open to Singapore towards resolving the water dispute between the city state and Malaysia.

He said Malaysia was willing to sit down and negotiate and it was now up to Singapore to take the next step.

"I think the ball is at Singapore's feet now. It is up to them to do whatever is necessary. We have said that we have not closed the door to negotiation.

"If Singapore wants to do it, they can contact us and we will be quite happy to sit down with them," he said when commenting on the publication of a series of advertisements and a booklet by the government to correct misconceptions and allegations made by Singapore over the stalled water negotiations.

Syed Hamid was speaking to reporters after receiving a visit from his South Korean counterpart, Yoon Young-Kwan, at Wisma Putra here.

The 20-page booklet entitled "Water: The Singapore-Malaysia Dispute - The Facts" was published by the National Economic Action Council (NEAC) to counter claims which appeared in the Singaporean publication, "Water Talks? If Only It Could".

It hit the streets yesterday at three sen a copy, the price Singapore is currently paying for every 1,000 gallons of Malaysia's raw water, which is at the centre of the dispute.

Syed Hamid pointed out that while the matter was still unresolved, Malaysia had continued supplying water to Singapore as a reasonable neighbour.

"Let us not go on the rhetoric and try to blame each other. Let us look at what is the real situation and resolve the issue in a serious and sincere manner," he said.

On another matter, the minister said the statement made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir that Myanmar risked being expelled from Asean if it refused to release detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi should be viewed as a "reminder from a good friend".

Syed Hamid said what was of concern was the credibility of Asean which must be seen as being principled in its position.

"We are willing to say (things) out to a fellow Asean country not in a confrontational way but in order for Myanmar to take heed of the views of the international community.

"It is better to have internal persuasion rather than strong external pressure that will force them into a more difficult situation," he said.

He also said that it was important for the Myanmar government to set a date for Suu Kyi's release and continue with the country's reconciliation process.

On his talks with Yoon, Syed Hamid said that they exchanged views on issues like the situation on the Korean peninsula, Palestine and Iraq.

"On the subject of the Korean peninsula, the Republic of Korea wants to see the issue of nuclear (non-proliferation) in the North resolved through peaceful means and not through any threat of regime change," he said.

-- BERNAMA

MAM JK