

31 JAN 2003

Syed Hamid-Singapore

SETTLE DIFFERENCES AMICABLY, SAYS SYED HAMID

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 31 (Bernama) -- Echoing sentiments expressed by the Umno Supreme Council, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today that Malaysia should not be the punching bag for Singapore's "expression of emotions".

He also believed that statements by Singapore belittling or discrediting Malaysia would not produce any positive results.

Speaking to reporters after appearing on RTM's morning talkshow programme, Syed Hamid said that the best thing to do now was to stop unnecessary talk and not to engage in finger-pointing.

He said that both sides could have strong differences but this should not translate into unwarranted action, such as the revelation by Singapore of what were supposed to be confidential documents pertaining to water price negotiation between the two countries.

"We can have strong differences but I think it is not right when you cannot agree on a negotiation, then you start to publish letters," he said.

Relations between Malaysia and Singapore are marked by several "irritants", chief among them are the water price revision issue and the sovereignty of Pulau Batu Puteh.

After chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting yesterday, Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that Malaysia would not let itself be used as a scapegoat to make Singaporeans forget their economic woes and other problems.

He also said that Malaysia would not engage in a war of words with the republic or try to out-argue it on issues.

On Singapore's move in making public the documents, Syed Hamid said that he did not think that "we will be able to write any letters to Singapore".

And when letters need to be written to the island republic, he said that Malaysia would have to be "very careful".

On the row between Cambodia and Thailand which saw rioters torching the Thai embassy and businesses in Phnom Penh, Syed Hamid said that the most important lesson from this incident was that a country must always be mindful of the sensitivities of another country.

"If we forget this, we may touch on something that could cause untoward incidents to erupt," he said.

He hoped that Cambodia and Thailand could overcome their problems through peaceful discussions so that they would not affect Asean as a whole.

"This should also serve as a lesson that we should not touch on religion, sovereignty, position of a country any which way we like," he said.

The riots were said to have erupted followed an alleged comment by a Thai actress that the Angkor Wat, Cambodia's national symbol, belonged to Thailand.

-- BERNAMA

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