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S'pore-Malaysia
S'PORE LOOKS FORWARD TO M'SIAN PM'S VISIT

SINGAPORE, Jan 5 (Bernama) -- Singapore says it looks forward to Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's visit to the republic on Jan 12.

"We will welcome his ideas and approach on how we can put the past behind us and move the bilateral relationship forward," Foreign Affairs Minister Prof S. Jayakumar said in Parliament today.

This will be Abdullah's first trip to the city state since taking over the helm from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Oct 31 last year.

The Malaysian premier will also call on Singapore President S.R. Nathan and Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew. He is also scheduled to visit other Asean countries such as Indonesia and Thailand this month.

In response to questions from members of parliament on Malaysia-Singapore ties, Jayakumar described its bilateral ties with Malaysia as multifaceted "and go beyond any single bilateral subject, whether bridge or other difficult issues that arose under Prime Minister Mahathir."

Jayakumar said both Malaysia and Singapore shared extensive historic, economic, trade and people-to-people links.

"And both sides need to build on these links, and as you have read about their meeting in Tokyo, both Prime Minister Goh and Prime Minister Badawi have stressed the importance of keeping bilateral relations good," he noted.

He said the challenge for both sides in the new era would be to look for ways of starting a new chapter in bilateral relations, "where we can press on with bilateral cooperation, work together for the interests of Asean, and to do all this without being saddled by the deadlocked issues of the old era."

"Yes, there are issues from the old era which have to be addressed, but we have to find a way of addressing them in a way that we do not

reopen the
acrimonious paths which we have travelled in previous years," said
the
minister.

Ties between the neighbours have been prickly due to disputes
over
issues such as the price at which Malaysia sells water to the
republic, a
proposed new bridge linking the two countries and Singapore
aircraft's use
of Malaysian airspace.

Declining to speculate on the issues to be discussed by the two
leaders
next Monday, Jayakumar said: "We will of course be willing to
discuss
issues that Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi may wish to raise and
listen to
any proposals that he may have."

"I think the broader point is that Singapore wants good
relations with
Malaysia. And I am certain that both Prime Minister Goh and Prime
Minister
Abdullah Badawi will discuss issues in the same positive and
forward-looking manner as in their first meeting in Tokyo," said the
minister.

Jayakumar said he believed both sides could continue to look for
ways
to cooperate for mutual benefit.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar was
quoted as
saying in Johor Baharu yesterday that no agenda had been set for the
meeting with Goh.

"There will be no restriction on issues. The only restriction
is,
perhaps, the time since it is only a one-day visit," Syed Hamid
said.

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