

## **Foreign relations: Polishing Malaysia's image and solving disputes among Pakatan Harapan's achievements**

**BERNAMA**

**24/04/2019**

PUTRAJAYA, April 24 (Bernama) -- The Pakatan Harapan (PH) government, fast approaching its first year of administering the nation, has notched several achievements in the international arena besides seeking solutions to diplomatic wrangles.

Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah said Malaysia, previously seen as a kleptocratic country by foreign nations, is now regarded as one that fights for democracy, freedom, human rights and rule of law.

“The most important achievement of PH for the past year is to polish Malaysia’s image, so that we are no longer known as kleptocratic, and the world sees Malaysia as a country that fights for democracy, freedom, human rights and rule of law,” he said in a special interview with the Malaysian media at his office at Wisma Putra in conjunction with the one year anniversary of PH’s rule this May.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, PH came to power in the historic 14th General Election on May 9 last year after defeating Barisan Nasional - formerly the Alliance Party - that ruled for 61 years.

Saifuddin said the new government is more at ease with discussing the four issues (democracy, freedom, human rights and rule of law) compared to the previous government.

On bilateral relations, Saifuddin said several disputes, notably those with Singapore and China, have been solved.

He said the dispute involving Singapore - the Johor Port limits and Instrument Landing System (ILS) for Seletar Airport - have been solved, while bilateral maritime issues and price review for raw untreated water being sold to the island republic are on the negotiation table.

Last July, Dr Mahathir said the selling price of raw treated water to Singapore is absurd, and requested a review.

The 1962 Johor River Water Agreement, ending in 2061, provides Singapore with 250 million gallons of raw water daily at 3 sen per 1,000 gallon and Malaysia, in turn, purchasing treated water at 50 sen per 1,000 gallon.

A discussion on the agreement started early this year by Malaysia's Attorney General Tommy Thomas and his Singaporean counterpart Lucien Wong.

Elaborating, Saifuddin said the request for new price made by Malaysia in the discussion -which has entered the price modality phase - is reasonable.

Meanwhile, Saifuddin said two main issues involving China - the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project and the Bandar Malaysia project - have been solved.

On April 12, the government announced that the ECRL project will resume at a reduced cost following the signing of a supplementary agreement (SA) between Malaysia Rail Link Sdn Bhd (MRL) and China Communications Construction Company Ltd (CCCC).

The construction cost for Phases 1 and 2 of the ECRL has now been reduced to RM44 billion - a reduction of RM21.5 billion from its original cost of RM65.5 billion.

On Friday last week, Dr Mahathir announced the government's decision to reinstate the Bandar Malaysia project with an expected gross development value (GDV) of RM140 billion after it was abruptly terminated in May 2017.

The Prime Minister said the decision was made after due deliberation during the Cabinet meeting on April 17 and IWH-CREC Sdn Bhd, the Malaysia-China consortium, the master developer for the project, would resume works on Bandar Malaysia.

Saifuddin said under the PH government's administration, Wisma Putra emphasised the New Malaysia Foreign Policy framework themed 'Change in Continuity'.

The framework listed the direction, improvement and new emphasis on foreign policy and the way Wisma Putra works.

Even though the government is new, external policies and fundamental principles such as neutrality and non-interference in other countries' affairs remain unchanged.

In addition, Malaysia's foreign policy on its interest in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) are also maintained, he said.

The minister said the administration had also been - and would continue - to introduce innovations in existing approaches, such as the Look East Policy 2.0 which emphasised the work culture and discipline of the Japanese as opposed to the same policy introduced in the 1980s which stressed on technological knowledge.

He also said the government would once again pay attention to the African continent.

"We have not come up with how we want to specifically handle African countries, but we have made the decision that we want to look at Africa again," he said.

In terms of international participation, Saifuddin said Malaysia will play an active role such as through co-sponsor resolutions.

"For example, (before this) when we were actively involved in the international arena, we were delegates in decision-making bodies such as the United Nations Security Council. At that time, we were active with important issues, but when we are not with the body, then we are less active.

"But recently, we co-sponsored a resolution on the safety of journalists (even though we did not participate in any decision-making platforms). We have never co-sponsored this kind of resolution before," he said.

Saifuddin said Malaysia would also promote the idea of ??Shariah Maqasid (higher shariah objectives) and "Muslim democrats" as new "Islamic products", as well as existing products such as the Islamic financial system and Islamic banking system.

"Often, people don't see Malaysia when talking about democracy. People see Pakistan, Tunisia, Indonesia and Turkey. We state that Malaysia also has experience as an Islamic state that practices good democracy," he said.

Malaysia will also highlight the 'Malay World' and its positive values ??that can be shared, such as love for peace and living together in harmony.

"Comparatively, the Malay World is a peaceful region where the major religions of the world and the major civilisations of the world can coexist peacefully and harmoniously," he said.

Saifuddin said Malaysia is also currently reviewing the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP) which has been very important to foreign affairs.

The programme, which began in 1980, involved the sharing of Malaysian experience and expertise with other developing countries.

Asked to list three things that still failed to happen in the past one year, Saifuddin said he

would continue to work to open diplomatic missions in Istanbul, Turkey and Palestine, ratifying as many international human rights conventions as possible, and resolving oil palm issues.

“(Palm Oil) It is a big issue. I know that we are not the lead agency but we take it upon ourselves that we are equally responsible to promote palm oil,” he said.

Together with the Ministry of Primary Industries, Wisma Putra is in talks with several other countries willing to buy more palm oil from Malaysia.

The minister said Pakatan Harapan's manifesto, which correlated directly to the ministry, includes the pledge on ratifying all remaining six international human rights conventions, namely the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT); International Convention on the Protection of The Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW) and International Convention For The Protection For All Persons From Enforced Disappearance (ICPED).

"For now we have problem with ICERD. We have made the decision not to ratify it. So we are left with five. The two low-hanging fruits would be the one on enforced disappearance (ICPED) and on torture (CAT). We are looking at these two. But we are not going to rush it. We are going to look at it properly. We are going to discuss it with all the relevant authorities," he said.

To a question on how would he grade himself and the Foreign Ministry in the first year, Saifuddin said: “I think we did reasonably well”.

-- BERNAMA

© 2018 BERNAMA. All Rights Reserved. Disclaimer | Privacy Policy| Security Policy

Source: <http://www.bernama.com/en/news.php?id=1719967>