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KL and Singapore set to resolve water supply issues

Ashraf Abdullah; Joseph Binkasan in London

MALAYSIA and Singapore have almost reached an understanding on the two countries' Water Supply Agreement, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said on Thursday.

Speaking to reporters after a 30-minute meeting with Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, Dr Mahathir said this was one of the issues which he discussed with Goh.

The current Water Supply Agreement between Malaysia and Singapore expires in 2061 and Singapore is seeking negotiations for a new agreement to begin immediately.

However, Malaysia feels that a new agreement should only be negotiated closer to the date of expiry of the current agreement.

Malaysia has, however, assured Singapore that it would not stop water supply after 2061.

In February, Malaysia made an undertaking to continue supplying water to Singapore after 2061 but made it clear that negotiations on the terms will only be made as the expiry of the current agreements draws closer.

Dr Mahathir said the Government cannot commit itself to any proposal on the terms of a new water pact with Singapore now because it cannot anticipate the situation at the time when the present agreements expires.

The undertaking was given during Goh's visit to Malaysia last February.

A joint communique issued after Goh's two-day working visit to Malaysia on Feb 16 and 17 said Malaysia had agreed to continue supplying water to Singapore beyond the expiry of the 1961 agreement in 2011, and the 1962 agreement in 2061, as well as the 1990 agreement on the same subject.

The continued supply will be on terms and conditions to be mutually agreed on between the two governments. The undertaking will be confirmed in an agreement within 60 days.

Under the present agreement, Singapore draws around 1,527 billion litres of untreated water daily at a cost of three sen per 4,540 litres.

Dr Mahathir said he also discussed with Goh the general situation in the region and the economic problems faced by the Asian countries.

On the Second Asia-Europe Meeting, Dr Mahathir said he would like to see a review of what Asem had achieved since its inaugural meeting in Bangkok in 1996.

"I hope something will come out from Asem 2," he said.

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