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KL pledges to supply water to S'pore after 2061

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MALAYSIA has given its undertaking to continue to supply water to Singapore after the year 2061 but made it clear that negotiations on the terms will only be made as the expiry of the current agreements draws closer.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad 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 the present agreements expires.

"The date is there for the purpose of indicating when we should (negotiate)... of course, it must be done before that (expiry date) but the situation prevailing at that time is something that we do not know.

"We cannot determine it now because we do not know what is going to happen at that time ... the cost, price and exchange rate. We cannot make a decision now which will commit future governments," he told reporters after accompanying Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong on a visit to the Measat Broadcast Network Systems complex in Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur, yesterday.

Goh, who arrived in Kuala Lumpur on Monday, was on a two-day working visit to Malaysia. Dr Mahathir and Goh discussed the water agreement issue during four-eyed and delegation meetings on Monday.

The water supply issue came in the wake of suggestions that some political groups in Malaysia have urged the Government to scrap two agreements to pipe water to the republic. The two agreements will expire in 2011 and 2061.

The fear of such a threat to cut off water supply to Singapore was brought about following strained relations between the republic and Malaysia over disparaging remarks by Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew on crime in Johor Baru early last year.

Lee had subsequently apologised for his remarks.

Responding to this, Dr Mahathir said, "We will continue to supply the water ... we will not cut off the supply or terminate the agreement. There will be no threat to cut the supply."

Dr Mahathir did not dismiss suggestions that the Singapore Government had asked Malaysia to enter into a new agreement now.

"I think Prime Minister Goh understands our position because water is on the state's list (jurisdiction) and not the federal list. I am actually giving a commitment even before getting the state (Johor) to agree. That is why we require 60 days to formalise this (agreement). In the meantime, I have to convince all my other colleagues and also the state government," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia is carrying out a study on future water requirements in the country to determine whether it can provide additional supply of water to the republic.

"They (Singapore) asked for additional water supply. This will depend on our study as to our future requirements. Once that is completed, we may enter into an agreement to develop new water supply for Singapore," he said, adding that the study needs a little bit of time to complete.

On investment, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia welcomes any proposed investment from Singapore, particularly in the infrastructure sector.

"Generally, if they (Singaporeans) want to invest in Malaysia, we encourage them," he said.

Dr Mahathir and Goh discussed the matter on Monday, and the Singapore Premier agreed that the republic will invest in Malaysia if it finds it worthwhile to do so.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia and Singapore also decided to re-activate easy communications between departments and ministries in the two countries to immediately deal with any problems that may affect bilateral relations.

On the regional front, Dr Mahathir said it is not the intention of Malaysia and Singapore to interfere in the internal affairs of Indonesia but merely discussed the impact it would have on both countries in view of the current situation there.

"We discussed generally about the situation in Indonesia ... not that we, in any way, are trying to interfere in its internal affairs. We respect the will of the people of Indonesia. But, we also know that what happens in Indonesia will have repercussion on the whole region," he added.

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