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Mahathir - Singapore

M'SIA WILL GIVE S'PORE WATER BUT WITH CONDITIONS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, July 7 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said Malaysia has agreed in principle to supply water to Singapore but with conditions.

"We have assured them that we will give them the water but there must be conditions to supplying water," he said.

Without stating the conditions, the prime minister said: "We just couldn't reach agreement on the details. In principle we have reached agreement."

"As you know, even between the states in Malaysia it's so difficult to resolve the problem of supplying water from one state to another," he told a press conference after launching the Registrar of Companies (ROC) centennial celebrations here.

He was asked to comment on his meeting with his Singapore counterpart Goh Chok Tong here in February during which they reportedly discussed the water supply issue.

The republic's Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar told Parliament last week that several outstanding issues in Singapore-Malaysia bilateral relations remained unresolved.

These include the water supply issue in which Singapore was reported to have sought legally binding conditions when the present agreements expire in 2011 and 2061.

Singapore gets about half of its daily water needs from Johor under the existing two agreements.

Dr Mahathir said: "Points of agreement are points of agreement but treaties are different matters.

"The points of agreement have yet to be ratified. We don't ratify them either at the cabinet level or at parliamentary level. This involves relations of two countries and we cannot just change treaties without reference to parliament."

Asked whether the water supply issue was related to the Singapore Central Provident Fund (CPF) issue involving about 200,000 Malaysians working in the republic, Dr Mahathir said he could not see how the two issues could be related.

Last Wednesday the Malaysian Cabinet urged Singapore to allow peninsular Malaysians, who no longer worked in the republic or were retrenched, to withdraw their CPF savings.

The CPF, reportedly to be holding more than RM1 billion in Malaysian workers' savings, only allows peninsular Malaysians full withdrawal upon reaching 55 years of age whereas those from Sabah and Sarawak can withdraw their savings upon completion of employment contracts in the republic.

Dr Mahathir, who is also chairman of the governing Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, was also asked about the BN's defeat in last Saturday's Arau parliamentary by-election.

The prime minister said a post-mortem into reasons for the defeat would be conducted.

"I've only heard rumours and unofficial versions, hence I can't comment just yet," he said.

PAS candidate Hashim Jasin defeated BN's Ismail Kassim by a majority of 1,323 votes in the by-election held following the death of the BN Member of Parliament Kamaruddin Ahmad last May 25.

-- BERNAMA

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