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Singapore-Water

SINGAPORE SAYS ITS WATER DEMAND IS NOT EXCESSIVE

SINGAPORE, June 7 (Bernama) -- Singapore has refuted a suggestion that its request for 750 million gallons (mgd) of water daily from Malaysia under a proposed new supply agreement is excessive.

"It is based on projection of our population growth and economic requirement and our estimated per-capita water consumption in the year 2061," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said in a statement, here, tonight.

The spokesman said it was comparable with the current per-capita consumption of many major cities such as Taipei and Bangkok.

Responding to a report in Malaysia's The Star newspaper on Saturday that Malaysia had asked Singapore to look elsewhere for its future water needs, he said Singapore "was surprised that Malaysian officials had chosen to leak details of confidential negotiations still in progress to the Malaysian press in a distorted form."

"The Malaysians were the ones who had wanted the discussions to be kept confidential. They seem to have changed their minds," he said.

A new water agreement is among the outstanding bilateral issues to be resolved as a package between the two countries. Senior foreign officials have met three times so far with the latest meeting held here on May 28.

Malaysia currently supplies 350 million mgd of untreated water at three sen per-thousand gallons to Singapore from its southern state of Johor under two water agreements which expire in 2011 and 2061.

It was reported that Singapore has demanded that Johor double the supply under a new 100-year agreement ending in 2161. Singapore officials were said to be adamant that another Malaysian state, Pahang, could meet their needs for 350 mgd of raw water and 400 mgd of treated water.

The spokesman said that if the talks had failed to make as much progress as expected, it was because the Malaysian officials had chosen to disregard agreements reached between Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his counterpart Goh Chok Tong last year.

"Instead, they have insisted on starting the negotiations from scratch and made many new demands," he said.

He said Singapore had taken the approach of offering "maximum benefit for both sides" by trying to accommodate new requests by Malaysia on issues such as railway land belonging to Malaysia in Singapore and the pension savings of West Malaysians workers in Singapore's Central Provident Fund.

The spokesman dismissed allegations that Singapore was profiteering from selling treated water to Johor, saying that it cost the republic RM2.40 to treat a thousand gallons of water which it sold to Johor at 50 sen per-thousand gallons.

Johor in turn sold the water at RM3.95 per-thousand gallons, he said.

He said that under the existing water agreement Singapore was required to sell only 15 mgd to Johor and the Malaysian state was not obliged to buy any treated water from the island nation.

Between 1993 and 1997, Johor bought an average of 37 mgd of treated water from Singapore.

"In any case, we have always told Malaysia that our request for water beyond 2061 is contingent on Malaysia satisfying its own water needs first.

"Singapore has also proposed that part of our long-term water requirements could be met by Pahang. This is in case Johor is not in a position to meet all of Singapore's long-term water needs."

The spokesman said Singapore would continue to take a constructive

approach and look forward to the next round of negotiations to be hosted by Malaysia this month or in August.

-- BERNAMA

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