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Singapore-Malaysia

SINGAPORE DAILY DRAGS MALAYSIA INTO GUS DUR CONTROVERSY

By: Tham Choy Lin

SINGAPORE, Nov 30 (Bernama) -- Singapore's leading newspaper, Straits Times, has dragged Malaysia into the controversy sparked by a verbal attack by Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid that the island-state cares only for profit and that Malaysia and Indonesia cut off water supply to Singapore.

A column by the daily's Jakarta correspondent today said on two occasions Abdurrahman had hit out at Singapore, the Indonesian leader had prior meetings with Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

Correspondent Susan Sim said palace-watchers in Jakarta thought there was a pattern in their president's diatribe.

"If one tirade is a coincidence, the second salvo surely cannot be an accident even if President Abdurrahman Wahid laughs it off the next day, serious palace-watchers here feel," wrote Sim from the Indonesian capital.

Abdurrahman and Dr Mahathir had breakfast together last Saturday on the sidelines of the Asean Informal Summit (AIS) here, the same day the former met the Indonesian expatriates privately and criticised Singapore.

"A little Pan-Malay solidarity workshop here leading to Singapore-bashing? Why not? Except that it seems so out of character for the promoter of racial and religious harmony. So who provoked whom?" said Sim.

Sim quoted a source at the meeting that Dr Mahathir was diplomatically silent when Abdurrahman suggested the two countries not sell water to Singapore but "of course, the suggestion came up after Dr Mahathir explained the water arrangement with Singapore."

Sim said the last time Abdurrahman accused Singapore of ripping off Malaysia by buying water cheaply was in May this year was to visiting United States' businessmen where he had also then threatened to bomb Singapore's yet-to-be-acquired submarines.

On that occasion, Abdurrahman had warned Singapore not to let its submarines cross into Indonesian waters.

"Bad information? Possibly. But guess who had called on him just the day before? Malaysia's Foreign Minister. Ah, so that is where the information about the pricing of Singapore's water supply came from," said Sim.

At last week's private meeting with the Indonesian community here, Abdurrahman or popularly known as Gus Dur, while berating Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, also said that the island republic was pursuing foreign policies only for profit and that it despised Malays.

-- BERNAMA

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