

# PM: Not much progress in talks with Spore

**PETALING JAYA:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the talks with Singapore to resolve all outstanding issues between the two countries, which started after his meeting with the republic's senior minister Lee Kuan Yew last September, had not made much progress.

"I must admit that there is not much progress because of (disagreement over) the price and amount of water to be exported to Singapore.

"However, it had not reached a deadlock yet. We are still talking but I will not be meeting Lee over the issue again. The time has passed for that," he told reporters after launching the Puteri Umno community centre at Taman Manja near here.

Asked why the talks had

stalled when the matter was reported to have been agreed upon in principle during his meeting with Lee, Dr Mahathir said what was agreed were only the principle issues to be included in the package to be discussed and not the details.

Malaysia, he said, had been very reasonable over the issue but Singapore still could not agree on the asking price.

He, however, did not disclose the price asked by Malaysia.

Lee, after the September meeting, announced that Singapore would pay 45 sen per 4,540 litres of raw water up to year 2061, 15 times more than the current price and 60 sen per 4,540 litres after that, subject to revision every five years.

He had said that Singapore would get 1,575 million litres of water per day from Malaysia until 2061 and after that, 450 million litres per day and another 1,125 million litres per day to be processed on a joint venture basis.

Dr Mahathir said for years Singapore had only been paying 3 sen per 4,540 litres of water and selling it back treated at 50 sen to Malaysia and charging up to S\$20 (RM42) for the same amount to ships docking at its port.

"We have been selling water to Singapore so cheaply since 1960 and we found out that what we pay for the treated water is the same as what they pay us for the whole amount of water that they have been getting.

"So, what happened is that

effectively, all these years they had been getting the water from us from free," he added.

Malaysia, he said, believed in the spirit of giving but that should not be construed as a willingness to compromise over the issue.

He also stressed that Malaysia wanted the issue to be thrashed out without delay because the longer it dragged, the more the country would lose.

Singapore and Malaysia signed a 50-year agreement in 1960 and a 99-year agreement in 1961 for water to be supplied to the republic.

Malaysia currently sells 910 million litres of raw water to Singapore for RM2.2mil and buys back 130 million litres of treated water

daily at RM5.3mil.

Earlier in Johor Baru, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia need not ask Singapore's permission to build the proposed new bridge to replace the causeway because it would be in Malaysian territory.

The completion of the project, scheduled in October 2006, would also see the Malaysian side of the 900m-long causeway demolished.

The Prime Minister said the project was different from the initial plan proposed in 1999 that would have involved Singapore.

"We will do it on our side. This will not involve Singapore. This is our project. Initially, we agreed with Singapore to do-it but that was something which was not decided."