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PM: Selfish behaviour regrettable (HL)

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Expressing regret over the selfish behaviour of Singapore, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the island republic's actions were hurting the otherwise close bilateral relations.

The Prime Minister said although Singapore was a neighbour, it was not behaving in a neighbourly manner, especially when it concerned the interests of Malaysia and Malaysians.

"We are saddened over how Singapore always acts in a way that can jeopardise the close ties between Malaysia and Singapore," he said when asked for his views on the continuing disputes with our southern neighbour.

At a Press conference after recording his New Year's message at his office this morning, Dr Mahathir pointed out that Singapore had been unfriendly towards Malaysia in almost all the issues that had cropped up between both nations.

"For instance, although at the time of Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965, they gave an undertaking that Malaysia's facilities in Singapore would continue to remain in the republic in accordance with the agreement previously entered into with the British, they failed to abide by it.

"They deliberately increased the rate for the lease (of land) for our naval base in Woodlands that we were forced to vacate, and we vacated it without being paid even a single sen in compensation ...and we didn't make a fuss over the matter."

Dr Mahathir said the water supply issue also caused problems in bilateral relations as Singapore still refused to accept the fact that Kuala Lumpur had the right to a price review. He said when Singapore requested the supply volume to be increased, Malaysia had agreed to its plea, considering "our neighbour's" population growth. (See also Page 13).

"But they are refusing a price review even though there is a written agreement which says that we have a right to a review after 25 years ...not on reaching the 25-year period but after 25 years. Their contention is that we have passed the time frame," he said, adding that another of Singapore's questionable policy towards Malaysia was the unequal recognition of Malaysians from the peninsula and those from Sabah and Sarawak in the Central Provident Fund issue.

"There are a host of other issues which I need not mention," Dr Mahathir said.

On the recent outcry concerning the ownership claim over Pulau Batu Puteh and Singapore's readiness to refer the case to the International Court of Justice, he said Singapore had been issuing such undertakings since 1998 but had failed to initiate concrete steps. (See also Page 6).

"We have been well prepared for quite a while now. I hope we do not have to see a replay of such a scenario."