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Mahathir-Water

DR MAHATHIR SAYS MALAYSIA HAS RIGHT TO WATER REVIEW

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has rebuffed Singapore's contention that Malaysia has no right to review the price of water it supplies to the republic.

He said that Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew came to see him twice to talk about revising the water price.

"I can't understand Singapore. If we don't have the legal right, then why did Lee Kuan Yew come and see me and suggested that the water price should be revised upwards to 45 sen and then we said it should be 60 (sen), 15 sen more.

"Now they are saying that we have no right, if we have no right why did he come and talk to us about revising the price of water," he said at a media conference after opening the inaugural Puteri Umno Assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here today.

He was asked to comment on Singapore Foreign Minister S.Jayakumar's statement that the republic would have to challenge every aspect of Malaysia's "claims" that it had the right to a price review under the 1961 and 1962 Water Agreements.

He told the Singapore parliament of the republic's position that Johor should have invoked the review clauses in 1986 and 1987 and that Johor had lost its right of review.

In the 1961 agreement signed by both countries, Singapore is entitled to receive 88 million gallons of raw water per day from the Pulai and Sungai Tebrau water catchment areas in Johor until August 2011 while under the 1962 agreement, the republic will receive 50 million gallons per day from Sungai Johor until September 2061.

He said that Lee had suggested that the price of water should be revised upwards to 45 sen and that the 45 sen should continue until 2011.

"In other words, he accepted the need to revise the price. He apparently is conscious that the 3 sen per 1,000 gallon which was fixed in 1927 is not a fair price.

"He came to see me twice and each time he talked about revising the price of water.

"Now they are saying that we have no right. This is the problem with Singapore, one day they say they want to consider the price and the next day they said there is no need. If there is no need then why did we meet at all," he said.

To another question, he said that if the water issue was not in the package of matters for discussion between the two countries, then the other issues can be settled first. This include the issue of Singapore's Central Provident Fund and the issue of air space.

"But they think that unless the water problem is not resolved, we can't talk on those things. So, okay, let's talk about water, settle it, the rest can follow," he said.

He said that Singapore was changing their mind and now becoming very legalistic, in reference to the statement by Jayakumar that Malaysia had no legal right in the matter.

Asked on Malaysia's next move, he said: "We will have to think about it".

Pressed if Malaysia would consider going to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), he said:

"We have gone to the International Court with regards to Pulau Batu

Putih. We are ready but the Singapore side is not yet ready with their case.

"So this thing can drag on and on and in the meantime, water is going to be sold at 3 sen," he said.

Asked to comment on the proposal by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim for a specific water act be drafted to overcome the problem, he said that the matter could be considered.

"We should study the agreement, whether it's too binding that there's an injustice. The world acknowledges that the price of 3 sen per 1,000 gallons is ridiculous, I've spoken to many people," he said.

He said that he was recently in Jeddah where he was asked whether Malaysia uses water as a leverage after he had suggested that oil could be used that way.

"When I explained that the 3 sen was the price fixed in 1927, they were shocked. Now they understand the injustice over the price paid to Malaysia," he said.

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