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S'pore-Water  
S'PORE SAYS IT STILL WANTS TO BUY WATER FROM M'SIA

SINGAPORE, Oct 24 (Bernama) -- Singapore has reiterated that it wants to buy water from Malaysia beyond 2061 when the 1962 Water Agreement expires, if the price is right.

"It is not correct to say that Singapore "shows no desire to reach a deal on water", as Singapore wants to buy water from Malaysia beyond 2061 when the 1962 Water Agreement expires, if the price is right," a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesman said in a statement here.

The MFA was commenting on remarks by Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reported in The Straits Times yesterday that "Everytime we go to Singapore, they want to talk only about water. Unless we solve that problem, we can't do anything. So I said, all right, let's focus on water."

The spokesman said that it was also incorrect that Singapore wanted to focus only on water.

"In fact, Singapore has sought to discuss all issues as a package. As part of the package, Singapore had been prepared to discuss subjects such as a bridge to replace the Causeway at Malaysia's request. It is Malaysia which wanted to discontinue the package approach," the spokesman added.

The ministry also released an excerpt of a letter from Dr Mahathir to Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong to make its case.

The MFA said that in his letter, dated Oct 7, Dr Mahathir told Goh that: "Malaysia has now decided to discontinue the package approach and to give the highest priority to first resolving the long-delayed water issue, particularly the price review of raw water."

This letter was written a day before Goh called on him in Putrajaya on Oct 8. "Prime Minister Goh had no inkling of this letter until he received it on Oct 10, said the spokesman.

"Malaysia's decision to discontinue the package was not put as a proposal to Prime Minister Goh and to ask if Prime Minister Goh agreed. It was a unilateral decision of Malaysia's," the spokesman added.

On Dr Mahathir's remarks that "there is room for trade-offs always, but it seems to me that there is no desire on the part of Singapore to make a compromise", Singapore said it had always urged that the package of issues be considered together as it enabled trade-offs to reach a win-win solution.

Singapore, the spokesman said, had offered various trade-offs in order to reach a win-win solution as part of the package.

Commenting on Dr Mahathir's remarks that Singapore had cut back its offer from 45 sen to 12 sen, the spokesman said: "This is a gross misinterpretation of Singapore's position."

"The 12 sen is not an offer from Singapore. It is Singapore's calculation of what the revised price of raw water would be if we proceed strictly on the basis of the factors in the review clauses. It was made clear to the Malaysian delegation at the talks in Johor Baharu that the 12 sen was not an offer but a calculation," the spokesman said.

"Our previous offer of 45 sen for current water had been in conjunction with Malaysia's offer of 60 sen for future water.

"But Malaysia withdrew its offer on 4 March 2002 and tabled new proposals including raising the price for current water to RM3. In effect, they rejected the 45 sen offer, which is therefore no longer on the table. Malaysia now wants to postpone discussion on the price and quantity of

future water till 2059," the spokesman said.

Since Malaysia had unilaterally abandoned the package, Singapore, the had no choice but to go strictly by the letter of the Water Agreements, he said.

The spokesman also referred to Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar's formal statement at the July 1-2 Ministerial Meeting that Malaysia would pursue the price review issue "consistent with the provisions of the two Agreements".

To date, he said, Malaysia had not provided any justification for its price revision proposals nor had it explained how its proposals were consistent with the factors listed in the Water Agreements.

On Dr Mahathir's remarks that Singapore had refused to pay a higher price than three sen, the spokesman reiterated Singapore's position that Malaysia no longer had a legal right to a price review.

"But Singapore was prepared to discuss price revision as part of a package which included the supply of future water after 2061. We participated in the Senior Officials' Meeting in Johor Baharu on 16-17 October 2002 in order to discuss all aspects of the water issue but Malaysia not only called off the package but even wanted to postpone discussion of future water until 2059," said the spokesman.

-- BERNAMA

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