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S'pore-Talks  
LET'S CONTINUE TO TALK, SAYS S'PORE

By: Salbiah Said

SINGAPORE, Oct 31 (Bernama) -- Singapore believes there is scope for discussions on the water issue with Malaysia, but says it must be on the basis of reciprocity and with the objective of having a mutually beneficial pact.

"So long as it is possible to continue the talks, I think my position would be that let's continue to talk. I don't think we have reached the position that Singapore should take the approach of not talking," said Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar in response to supplementary questions in Parliament today.

"For example, take the situation we had when (Malaysian) PM (Datuk Seri Dr) Mahathir (Mohamad)'s letter came on unilaterally discontinuing the package.

"We could have decided, well, in that case, we do not go to Johor Baharu. But in good faith, we showed that we are reasonable and went to Johor Baharu to discuss both aspects of the water issue," said the minister.

"Although they (Malaysia) say that we have been unreasonable and we have been delaying, from the facts that I have unfolded today, I think, should make it clear to everyone that we have gone the extra mile, we have tried to accommodate their concerns, but they are the ones who keep changing the goalposts, keep changing the parameters.

"The package - didn't include bridge, then it is included, then it is out, then never included raw water, then price revision in, then water is out, and even when it is out, it is only price revision, and future water discussed only after some of us or most of us are dead. So...there is scope for discussions."

To another question, Jayakumar said the water negotiations or the package negotiations were only one of the facets of Singapore's overall relations with Malaysia. "It is not the sum total of our relationship with Malaysia."

"As Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the other day, we will persevere and try to get our discussion going but if we cannot agree, it does not mean that it is the end of the relationship. What is the prospect of resolving this? It is very difficult to say.

"I have stated Singapore's readiness to continue. As Foreign Minister, like all foreign ministers, one has to be optimistic, whatever the obstacles and hurdles, and I will persevere as best as we can.

"But, it must be on a certain basis. It must be on the basis of reciprocity; it must be on the basis of mutual benefit. And, it cannot be on the basis of one side's approach to the negotiations," said Jayakumar.

Singapore now buys raw water from Malaysia at three sen per 1,000 gallons under two agreements signed in 1961 and 1962, which expire in 2011 and 2061 respectively.

-- BERNAMA  
SS YBY