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Towards fast conclusion of talks

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BANGI, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said Malaysia wants discussions with Singapore on a broad range of issues, including water supply, to be completed fast.

But this could not be realised following the republic's disagreement on water pricing.

"Singapore is asking for terms that we cannot accept. They want to pay 45 sen per 1,000 gallons which we think is too cheap, considering that Hong Kong pays China RM8 per 1,000 gallons."

Dr Mahathir said this when asked to elaborate on his statement yesterday that Malaysian and Singaporean officials had failed to conclude talks on an agreement reached last September involving several issues.

He was speaking at a Press conference after launching Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Career Day at its main campus here.

Giving the historical background on how the current price of three sen was fixed, Dr Mahathir said:

"It was determined at a time when Singapore was about to join Malaysia. So the attitude then was quite different ... not a foreign country as such. Also, the agreement was drawn up by the British, which of course favoured Singapore."

The Prime Minister felt the discussions should not go on indefinitely.

He also said the bridge project linking Johor Baru and the republic would not be affected by the delay in concluding the agreement.

Malaysia and Singapore last September agreed in principle to resolve all outstanding issues between them.

The agreement was reached during bilateral discussions jointly chaired by Dr Mahathir and Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew in Putrajaya.

The two countries agreed that officials from both sides would work out the details of a final agreement which would be signed by the Prime Ministers of both countries.

The outstanding issues include the sale of water to Singapore, the points of agreement for the development of railway land owned by KTM Bhd, and the status of the Malaysian Customs, immigration and quarantine facility at the KTMB station in Tanjung Pagar.

Two other issues concern the use of Malaysian airspace by the Singapore Air Force and withdrawals from Singapore's Central Provident Fund by our workers.

Both sides also agreed to a proposal by Malaysia to construct a new bridge linking the two countries and demolish the Causeway after the completion of the bridge in 2007. No time frame was given for signing the final agreement.

Regarding Pas, he said it had no sympathy at all for Keadilan. "In fact, when Anwar (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim) was still in Umno, Pas was the one which first accused him of indulging in immoral activities. But when they see the person could be used, they used him."

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