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S'pore-Water

S'PORE SHOWS NO DESIRE TO REACH WATER DEAL- DR MAHATHIR

SINGAPORE, Oct 23 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says Singapore is not showing any desire to reach a compromise in the protracted water dispute between the two countries, the Straits Times reported.

He was quoted as saying that Singapore had cut the price it was prepared to offer for water from the previous 45 sen per thousand gallons to 12 sen now that the water issue had been delinked from the package of outstanding bilateral issues.

"That is not making progress," he said.

Singapore was being unreasonable in not agreeing to an increase in the three sen rate it now paid for water, a price which was set in 1927.

"I don't know who can claim that this is a reasonable price," he said during an interview with visiting foreign journalists in Putrajaya yesterday.

He made these points in response to a question whether he would like to see the string of thorny bilateral issues settled before he stepped down as Prime Minister next October, to hand over a clean slate to his successor.

Without responding directly to the question, Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia had always wanted good relations with Singapore and its other neighbours.

But it was unfortunate that the Singapore Government was not showing any desire to reach an agreement on the water issue, said the Straits Times.

Asked why the two sides had decoupled the issues instead of discussing them as a package, which might allow more room for compromise, he said that this was because "every time 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."

"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."

The Straits Times, quoted sources as saying that the 12 sen that Dr Mahathir mentioned was not an offer but a calculation based on price review clauses in the water agreements.

After taking into account inflation over the past 40 years, the figure is close to 12 sen, the sources told the Straits Times.

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