

29/01/2002

Malaysia just as eager to solve bilateral issues

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Malaysia is as eager as Singapore to resolve outstanding bilateral issues which have come to a standstill following failure to agree on the sale of water to the republic.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia was losing money daily with the delay in fixing the price of water.

"When Singapore delays the negotiation and refuses to accept our request, which is only for a reasonable figure, we are losing money everyday," he said, noting that the Singaporean authorities were aware that Malaysia wanted officials from both sides to deal with the details as soon as possible.

"What we know is that we have been charging them three sen per 1,000 gallons of raw water.

"We know that countries like Hong Kong buy water from mainland China at RM8 per 1,000 gallons... obviously, we are underpaid," he said after opening the Treasury's Quality Day celebration in Jalan Duta.

A Singapore Foreign Ministry spokesman was quoted by Bernama yesterday as saying that Singapore had written several times to Malaysia, the last being Dec 10, on the package of outstanding issues and was awaiting a reply.

"Singapore had requested Malaysia to set out its position on these and other issues so that there would be a clear framework for both sides, led by the two Foreign Ministers, to meet on the details," the spokesman had said.

The island-state has offered to pay 45 sen per 1,000 gallons.

Singapore imports 350 million gallons of raw water daily from Johor, which in turn buys back 37 million gallons of treated water at 50 sen per 1,000 gallons.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would announce the price it wished to charge for its water when the time was right.

While it could not be immediately ascertained if Singapore had profited from the re-sale of water to Johor, he said Malaysia would not allow the issue to sour relations with Singapore.

"I don't think so ... Our relations can be okay, but this thing (issue) must be settled," he added.

On another issue, Dr Mahathir denied that Malaysia had been used as a launch pad for the terrorist attacks on the United States on Sept 11, last year.

"The launch pad is actually in the US as these people trained in the US all the time.

"There, they planned how to hijack US planes, at what time, which plane and which building.

"They went to Switzerland but were never arrested," Dr Mahathir said, adding that it would be senseless to arrest every Arab tourist who visited Malaysia.

Newsweek said in its latest edition that Malaysia was a primary operational launch pad for the airborne suicide attacks in New York and Washington, citing secret Federal Bureau of Investigation data.

The report said US intelligence sources believed a former Malaysian army captain, Yazid Sufaat, who was a member of the extremist group Jemaah Islamiah, helped develop a support network for chief terror suspect Osama bin Laden in Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would have taken the appropriate action if the FBI, which had prior knowledge of the terrorists, had informed the Government about the activities.

"Let's see the evidence. It is very easy to say that he (Yazid) has done it, but did he do it from Malaysia? Did he plan everything? I doubt it. It's too sophisticated an operation.

"(But) we have taken action when we found out who they were and what they were planning... We have arrested all or most of them."

On Jan 4, 13 people, including the 37-year-old Yazid from Kedah, were arrested under the Internal Security Act for their involvement with the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia.

Denying that Malaysia had any connection with the Sept 11 attacks, Dr Mahathir said:

"What we do know is there are Malaysians trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan, who had intentions to destabilise the country, to create racial and religious tensions, and if possible, to establish a Government through their act of violence."

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