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Syed Hamid-Water/BM

MALAYSIA GIVING SINGAPORE LAST CHANCE ON WATER ISSUE

KOTA TINGGI, Johor, Oct 13 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is giving Singapore one last chance to prove its willingness to find a solution to the water pricing issue, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

"We are giving them one more chance. We want to know whether they want to resolve it or otherwise. If they do not want to resolve, we will have to adopt another approach," he told reporters here.

"If not we will be wasting our time talking without end...the crux of the matter is Singapore is not at all showing any earnestness...as though they are meeting us with a view to delaying finding a solution."

He said this when asked about the official-level meeting between the two countries to be held in Johor Baharu on Oct 16 and 17.

"When they meet us they tell us this and we understand... it is not that we do not understand English...the language is simple...but when they return home their meaning becomes different," he said.

"We are giving them one more chance...failing which it will be decided by the legal process," he said.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia knew of its rights under the Water Agreement with Singapore.

"Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong during his last visit told Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad let's solve the issue of water because it is disturbing our bilateral relations."

"He (Goh) said we should look at the bigger picture where we can cooperate for the good of the region... but immediately they pick needles and pins as soon as they go back," he said.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia accepted in good faith Singapore's agreement to discuss the price of water and once this had been resolved, both countries could move on to settling other issues.

"However if the talks on even the price of water cannot move forward, other things also cannot go ahead," he said.

Syed Hamid said the main issue was that Malaysia was not getting an appropriate price since 1986 from the water sold to Singapore at the rate of 3 sen per 1,000 gallons.

"And they (Singapore) have been enjoying the best water at a rate that is no longer reasonable," he said.

"We do not want to ask Singapore to agree or disagree after this, we will state our rights. We are not subject to Singapore. We must be talking about our rights. Let us not respond to what they say."

"Water is our commodity... we are saying this is what our right is. If they're interested we'll go on with the negotiations. If they are not interested, let us settle it through the court of law, through arbitration or whatever the agreement provides," he said.

"Our product, our commodity, our land, our airspace, so why should we go and listen to what they say... can or cannot... that's ridiculous," he said.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia had compromised by meeting Singapore's request and putting forward a formula as the basis for the review of the raw water price.

"They say we must take into account their alternative sources of water, we say yes, but they include only Newater... but we say you also desalinate and we want to include both the cost including that of desalination, because if you don't get water from us that is what your cost is going to

be," he said.

After that Singapore requested for a 50 per cent discount, he said.

"What basis can you impose on the vendor to give you a discount?" he said, adding, "Don't take us for a ride."

The Foreign Minister said that he had already told Singapore that when an agreement on the new tariff for raw water was reached and the revised price was backdated to 1986, the republic could also revise the price of its treated water sold to Malaysia.

"At the end of the day, let us work out what is the difference between the price of our raw water and your price and we will settle on the difference but the principle must be accepted," he said.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia had set its mind on finding a solution but not at all cost.

"In a win-win situation both parties must win and have an equal position and not a position where one party enjoys the best resources of Malaysia and then holds Malaysia to ransom," he said.

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