

11 OCT 2002

Mahathir-Water

MALAYSIA TO BACKDATE WATER DUES FROM SINGAPORE

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 11 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia will backdate the new water price from the dates it was supposed to revise the water rates for Singapore to recover the losses caused by the delay in the fixing of the new rates.

The prime minister said Singapore had been getting cheap water from Malaysia when it kept delaying the process to fix the new water price.

"Once we fix the price, it must be backdated. We have to get back the money that we lose," he told a news conference after launching the World Sight Day 2002 at the KLCC, here.

Malaysia and Singapore signed two water agreements in 1961 and 1962. Under the 1961 agreement, Singapore can draw 88 million gallons (MGD) daily from the Pulai catchment area and Tebrau and Skudai rivers in Johor up to Aug 31, 2011.

The 1962 agreement allows Singapore to draw another 50 MGD from Sungai Johor until Sept 28, 2061. The two agreements provide for a revision of the water pricing after 25 years, which were due in 1986 and 1987 respectively.

Malaysia now sells its raw water to Singapore at three sen per 1,000 gallons and buys back treated water from the republic at 50 sen per 1,000 gallons.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia did not revise the water pricing when it was due then because of it thought that Singapore would also revise the price of treated water supply to Malaysia.

"But now, even if they revise their treated water, we don't mind. They can revise their treated water, we can revise our raw water, there must be a formula," he said.

The prime minister said Malaysia was ready to negotiate with Singapore on the new water pricing and hoped that Singapore was prepared with its reasons as the basis for the negotiations.

"We have already given our reasons, unfortunately Singapore keeps on dragging its feet and in the meantime, we are losing money.

"We don't depend on selling water to maintain our government. It's a small thing but the principle of it is that when you buy water, you pay the same amount," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that even the water sold to Melaka by Johor was fixed at 30 sen per 1,000 gallons, or 1,000 per cent more compared with what Singapore was paying Malaysia now.

Singapore sells its treated water to ships at S\$20 per 1,000 gallons.

"You buy raw water at three sen, process it and then sell it at S\$20 per 1,000 gallons," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Malaysia would not cut off water supply to Singapore and wanted to continue the supply as in the agreements, but the agreements also provided for a revision of the pricing.

On Singapore's denial that it had agreed to a revision of the water price, Dr Mahathir said he was surprised at the statement as Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong had told him that he agreed to a revision.

"I don't know, that's the problem during negotiations. It was very clear (agreement on the revision). What he is not quite agreeable on is that we separate water from the other issues.

"But we find that the water problem cannot be settled, to the extent that the other issues also cannot be resolved," he said.

He said Singapore did not want Malaysia to backdate the water pricing

and revision and kept on delaying the fixing of the new price.

Asked to comment on Goh's statement at the World Economic Forum here recently that Singapore rejected the idea of the Asean+3 secretariat, Dr Mahathir said:

"Singapore rejects everything that comes from Malaysia. We have problem with the EAEC (East Asia Economic Caucus) before because Singapore rejected (it)," he said, adding that Malaysia tried to be as friendly as possible with Singapore but it was impossible.

-- BERNAMA

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