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Mahathir-Singapore

M'SIA HOPES TO SETTLE WATER PRICE WITH S'PORE AT BILATERAL MEETING

KUALA LUMPUR, June 20 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is confident some of the outstanding issues with Singapore will be resolved when their officials meet at a bilateral meeting here early next month, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said the meeting would at least try to end several issues between the two nations, especially the issue relating to the price of water sold to Singapore.

"We will discuss all the issues," Dr Mahathir told reporters after today's proceedings of the 56th Umno General Assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Asked on his expectations of the bilateral talks, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had always expected "something good" from the talks and was positive of making some progress.

Malaysia and Singapore have various outstanding issues which were yet to be resolved, including withdrawal of Central Provident Fund (CPF) by Malaysians, the fate of KTM Bhd land bank in Singapore and the use of Malaysia's airspace by Singapore's fighter jets.

Negotiations to resolve the issues have been going on since last year after an agreement was reached between Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Dr Mahathir in 2000 to lump the outstanding issues in a package.

Asked which of the issues were likely to be decided, Dr Mahathir said: "We will probably decide on the price of water."

On whether he was confident that the water issue would be solved in this bilateral meeting, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia wanted to sell its water at a reasonable price according to the present rate.

"Well, I think it is ridiculous to sell water at 3 sen per thousand gallons when Hong Kong is buying water from mainland China at RM8 per thousand gallons. So, that is the kind of figure we are making comparison with," he said.

Malaysia has been selling water since its southern neighbour gained independence in the mid-1960s and the agreement to sell water to Singapore signed then will lapse in 2061.

Last month, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong expressed the hope that the two neighbours could settle their outstanding issues fast so that they could concentrate on tackling more important regional problems like terrorism.

-- BERNAMA

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