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Ghani-Water

M'SIA-S'PORE WATER ISSUE CAN BE SETTLED AMICABLY, SAYS MB

JOHOR BAHRU, Jan 3 (Bernama) -- Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman has expressed confidence that the water issue between Malaysia and Singapore can be settled amicably based on the spirit of neighbourliness.

"I am confident that both countries can resolve this issue amicably. This issue involves two parties, Singapore which needs water supply and Malaysia which is capable of supplying it," he told reporters after launching Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's Student Guidance and Academic Excellence Programme in Skudai here today.

Abdul Ghani said this when asked to comment on former Malaysian army field commander Lt Jen (Rtd) Datuk Seri Zaini Mohd Said's statement that he feared the water issue could spark a military conflict if not resolved properly.

Writing in the Mingguan Malaysia "Penulis Tamu" column today, Zaini also described the water issue as "the most serious".

Abdul Ghani said the Malaysian government would continue to supply water to the island republic according to the two water supply agreements signed by the two countries.

"We have never said that we do not want to supply water...I believe that based on the spirit of neighbourliness and this factor of need and capability, we can resolve this matter to the agreement of both sides," he said.

Asked if the issue could strain ties between Johor and Singapore, Abdul Ghani said: "Ties are as normal...there are no signs of any change," he said.

Singapore now buys 350 million gallons of raw water daily from Johor at three sen per 1,000 gallons under the two agreements expiring in 2011 and 2061.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said recently that talks on a package of outstanding issues with Singapore had stalled because both sides had yet to reach a new price for water which Malaysia has been supplying since the 60s.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was asking a reasonable price and wanted a quick settlement as the longer the delay, the more money Malaysia would lose.

However, Singapore has denied delaying negotiation or refusing to pay a reasonable price for water supply from Malaysia.

-- BERNAMA

RAM YBY