

26/01/2002

DPM: Priority for resolving water issue

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today said he believed that the water issue between Malaysia and Singapore needed to be resolved before there is progress on other issues.

Asked on the possibility of a solution in the near future, he said: "There have been many discussions and it is a central issue.

"I always believe that until the water problem is resolved there will be many other issues that will remain unresolved."

"I think Singapore's attitude is that if we can resolve the water issue, then other subjects can also be taken up and resolved.

"They are attaching all importance to water. To Singapore, it is water first," he added.

Asked how he thought the matter could be resolved, Abdullah said both sides will continue to talk.

On what sort of attitude both sides should adopt to resolve the issue, he said Malaysia had always said in any negotiation one had to be constructive.

"We have already indicated and the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) himself has said that as far as Malaysia was concerned we will ensure that Singapore will get the water.

"We are not going to allow the Singaporeans to be deprived of water ... they will get thirsty, they die because of that, we are not going to do that."

"That assurance had been given. These are all the other details of price per gallon, filtered water, unfiltered water. All sorts of other details.

"That bogs down all the discussions we have on various issues concerning bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore," he said.

Asked if he expected Singapore to pay more than what they offered, he said an agreed price should be paid.

On what Singapore should do to ensure that the matter can be resolved, Abdullah said: "They have to understand that we also need water on our side. It will remain important to Malaysia and particularly to Johor.

"We can't just be looking after their needs... our requirements are also important," the Deputy Prime Minister said.

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