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S'pore-Water
PEACE NOT WAR KEY TO RESOLVING WATER DISPUTE

By: Salbiah Said

SINGAPORE, Nov 10 (Bernama) -- Peace and not war: This is the message some concerned Singaporeans wish to convey to both Malaysia and Singapore governments over their water dispute that has so far ended in a stalemate.

"I cannot see why we (Singapore) cannot go back to discussions with Malaysia in a more friendly manner. Let us negotiate the price with Malaysia again, except this time we will buy water based on the price they ask for," said a Singaporean on Channelnewsasia.com's Forum on Water Issue.

The surfer, identified as "Dan" proposed that Singapore buy only quantities which were needed to supplement its current needs.

"The quantity we buy will depend on the asking price. When the price is no longer competitive, we will stop buying altogether.

"Meanwhile, we hand over the responsibility of supplying water to Johor back to the Malaysian Government. It will give both parties time to adjust to the changes and perhaps bring about a win-win situation. I ask both governments to consider my suggestion," said Dan in his e-mail.

"Initially, the water issue with Malaysia was discussed in a friendly manner. Although I totally support our plan to be totally independent of water supplies from Malaysia in the future, I feel that the manner in which we introduced our Newater was a threat to Malaysia," Dan said.

Dan believed the problem was greater for Malaysia in the next few years because the supply of such a large amount of excess water required new water supply systems and new customers.

"It will take years to accomplish this even if the new customers are in Malaysia. For Singapore, we have to be prepared to use water more carefully and probably have to be ready to pay more until more advanced technology helps us to produce water at a lower cost," added Dan.

Another Channelnewsasia.com visitor named Rumpelstiltskin said a purely commercial transaction would not have taken so long to settle.

"Perhaps it is time to de-link the water issue from the rest of the political baggage. (Datuk Seri) Dr Mahathir (Mohamad)'s suggestion to de-link makes sense as it removes the political overtones of this issue and make it a purely commercial transaction," he said.

Water, he noted, is an issue that could lead to actual war between Malaysia and Singapore and must be handled carefully and separately from the rest of the issues, said Rumpelstiltskin.

"The Singapore Government should not insist on negotiating everything as a package. Malaysia does not have to sell water to Singapore at all. She does not need the money from such a sale. Singaporeans should wake up to this reality. Grow up....fast!", said Rumpelstiltskin.

Another visitor named LeFire said: "The sale is largely symbolic and to entrench cross-border friendship and show the world the friendly nature of the Malaysian Government towards its neighbours. Do not underestimate the resolve of the Malaysian Government to stop future supplies if the water issue should escalate into more bad blood.

"They are free to stop future supplies beyond the dates bound by contract. However, if they choose to stop the current supply... that will be equivalent to an act of war. We won't underestimate them. It's their right to stop the supply if they want to. Afterall, the water came from a Malaysian river.

"But they better make sure they can stomach the consequences of such a drastic act, considering the disparity of both countries' military forces

in question.

"Politics and military will always be entwined with each other... I'm all for peace. But let it be known to them that both sides must tread carefully and watch their p's and q's... not just the Singaporeans."

Another surfer identified only as 'Singaporean' said that he appreciated the fact that Malaysia had been very kind to Singapore for selling water at 3 sen for the past years.

"However, bear in mind that 3 sen was a price agreed then. Which was the fair value then therefore it should not be seen as cheap now. If 60 sen is the agreed price now, what would it be in another 50 years? 60 sen may be a fair price now but 50 years later due to inflation, we will be seen cheating them into a contract again."

The breakdown of all these talks, said the Singaporean, were not the fault of a single party, "both parties are trying to profit as much as they could from the deal."

"Even though Singapore can be independent of water from Malaysia, it will be seen as an act of hostility by the other if that happens. There is no point in going to war at all. To gain water? Since Singapore can be self-sufficient of water, why must it go to war then? "

"On the other hand, since it is Malaysia's decision to allow the water agreement to lapse, why must it go to war with Singapore then? War will not break out so easily. Since one party does not need another in any resources then why must it be a dispute or war?

"All this happens due to a lack of understanding, sincerity and goodwill from both parties. Hopefully, things will take a better turn in future," said the Singaporean visitor.

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