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S'pore-Package

S'PORE RELENTS, AGREES TO DISCUSS WATER SEPARATELY

SINGAPORE, Oct 15 (Bernama) --Singapore has agreed to discuss water and other issues in the package of bilateral issues with Malaysia separately, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesman said today.

"Now that Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr) Mahathir (Mohamad) insists on treating water separately and discontinue the package, these trade-offs are no longer possible.

"Singapore will deal with water and the other issues individually and separately, on their stand-alone merits, no longer as a package," the spokesman added in a statement.

The spokesman said this in response to media queries on Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar's statement that Malaysia was "giving Singapore one more chance" to resolve the water issue at the two-day senior officials' meeting to be held in Johor beginning tomorrow.

The spokesman said Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong had on Oct 14 (yesterday) replied to Dr Mahathir's letter dated Oct 7 stating Malaysia's decision to discontinue the package approach.

Goh in his reply said that both Prime Ministers had all along agreed to proceed to trade off, in a package, the benefits to each other from the various items that is water, airspace, Points of Agreement (POA), Central Provident Fund (CPF), and the bridge to replace the Causeway, said the MFA.

The spokesman was asked on whether this meant that the offers and concessions that Singapore had made on the other issues in the package such as the POA, early withdrawal of CPF monies by West Malaysians and Singapore's agreement to share the cost of replacing the Causeway with a bridge, were off the table.

To this, the spokesman said: "Now that Malaysia has discarded the package approach, this has to be the case as there is no longer any basis for trade-offs."

Earlier today, Dr Mahathir told reporters in Kuala Lumpur that Malaysia was not ruling out taking the water price issue with Singapore to arbitration as one way to resolve it.

He had also said he had not received any reply from his Singapore counterpart to his suggestion (which was made in a letter to Goh) that the water price issue be separated from the package of outstanding bilateral issues.

-- BERNAMA

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