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S'pore-Water

S'PORE MAINTAINS WATER PRICE REVIEW BE PART OF PACKAGE

By: Salbiah Said

SINGAPORE, Oct 9 (Bernama) -- Singapore maintains that it is prepared to discuss a water price revision as part of the bilateral package of outstanding issues with Malaysia.

"Singapore's position that Malaysia did not have a legal basis for reviewing the price of water under the 1961 and 1962 Agreements after a 15/16-year delay, has not changed," said Ong Keng Yong, Press Secretary to Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in a statement here today.

He said this in response to a statement by Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar yesterday that the Singapore premier had accepted that Malaysia had the right to review the price of water under the two agreements.

Ong said that this legal point was not discussed by both Goh and Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during their meeting in Putrajaya.

"However, Prime Minister Goh had told Prime Minister Mahathir that Singapore was prepared to discuss such a price revision as part of the bilateral package," he explained.

On Syed Hamid's statement that the water issue was now decoupled from the package, Ong said that it was not.

Goh, he added, had told Dr Mahathir that all the issues, including Malaysia's proposed revision in the price of water Singapore currently bought from Johor, must be resolved as part of the package.

Meanwhile, on Goh's meeting with Dr Mahathir, Ong said in a separate statement that both countries agreed that the package of issues should be resolved as soon as possible so that they could deal with and work together on the larger challenges.

He said that Goh told Dr Mahathir that Singapore was prepared to discuss a revision in the price of water Singapore currently bought from Johor, within the context of the package.

Both the Prime Ministers agreed that the officials who were meeting next week should try to resolve the issue of pricing of water (current and future), said Ong, noting Goh had said at that meeting, that both sides should exchange the basis for their respective offers on the price of water.

During the 30-minute meeting, Goh, who shared his concerns on terrorism in the region with his Malaysian counterpart, had noted that from the Jemaah Islamiyah arrests, Singapore had discovered that the terrorists' agenda was pan-Southeast Asian, and many of the terrorist groups in the region had links with Al-Qaeda.

"Singapore was concerned that Southeast Asia would become a theatre of operations for terrorist groups, and that economic development in the region would then take a backseat," said Ong on the meeting.

According to Ong, Dr Mahathir, who shared with Goh his own perspectives on terrorism, said that where terrorism in Malaysia was concerned, Malaysia was on top of the situation.

However, Dr Mahathir told Goh that both countries could share intelligence and cooperate to deal with the issue.

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