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S'pore-Water

S'PORE REITERATES WATER ISSUE IS NOT ABOUT MONEY

SINGAPORE, Jan 31 (Bernama) -- The Singapore government has reiterated its stand that the water dispute between the two neighbours is not about money.

"Singapore will not be impoverished by an increase from the three sen that we pay Malaysia now. Nor will, as Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir) Mohamad himself acknowledged last August, Malaysia be enriched," said the Press Secretary to Foreign Affairs Minister Prof S. Jayakumar in a statement today.

Dr Tan Lian Choo was responding to media queries about Dr Mahathir's 'rhetorical question' to the media yesterday, as to whether Singapore would lose its sovereignty by raising the price of water it now buys from Malaysia.

In a strongly worded statement, she said: "Let me restate Singapore's position, for the benefit of all who apparently have difficulties understanding it. Minister Jayakumar clearly stated that the real issue was not on the price of water."

She quoted Jayakumar as saying in parliament last Saturday that: "The vital issue is not how much we pay, but how any price revision is decided upon. Malaysia wants Singapore to pay more for water. But the price cannot be revised at the will or dictate of Malaysia."

Dr Tan also quoted the minister as saying that the 1961 and 1962 Water Agreements were enshrined in the Separation Agreement which was registered at the United Nations.

"They are fundamental to our very existence as an independent nation. Neither Singapore nor Malaysia can unilaterally change them. This is the root of the dispute between us," Jayakumar said.

According to the minister, the Water Agreements were guaranteed by the Separation Agreement and Malaysia's own Constitution. "If we allow one part of the Separation Agreement to be changed at Malaysia's whim, where will it all end?", he asked.

Yesterday, Dr Mahathir said that it was absurd to suggest that sovereignty was a function of the price of water.

"Fantastic, you know, the price goes up from three sen to 3 1/2 sen and Singapore loses its sovereignty. Is that so? Sovereignty is so cheap," he said.

"Say you don't want to pay, it is easier," said the premier.

-- BERNAMA

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