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Mahathir-S'pore

M'SIA TO GIVE ITS SIDE OF STORY ON WATER TALKS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, July 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia will publish a booklet or articles in newspapers to explain every point raised by Singapore in its smear campaign against the country over the stalled water talks between the two nations.

"We will have to explain everything. We will give our version of the problem.

"They have given their version, and we don't think it's right at all. Just a simple thing, like is anything that was sold at 3 sen in the year 1927 sold at 3 sen in the year 2003? Just a simple question like that," he told reporters after opening the International Convention on Gold Dinar as an Alternative International Currency at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

The Prime Minister was asked about Singapore's latest move in publishing a booklet containing extracts of official correspondence between the two countries, including letters exchanged between Dr Mahathir and Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

The booklet, "Water Talks? If Only It Could" was published by the Singapore Information, Communications and Arts Ministry.

The booklet, among others, accused Malaysia of being unreasonable leading to the water negotiation being stalled and that it always changed its stand especially in fixing the price of raw water.

On whether the Malaysian Government would come up with a similar booklet, Dr Mahathir said: "We can publish a similar booklet or we can put it up in the papers. We will explain every point."

To a question if the government would make public all letters corresponded by the leaders of the two countries, the Prime Minister said the government would not do that as it was unethical.

He said the Malaysian Government followed strictly international practice that private letters should not be made public or displayed.

"Now it is very difficult to write a letter because we know if we write a letter it can be used as propaganda," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether he would meet Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, once and for all, to settle the water dispute between the two countries before he retires in October.

"We've met so many times already, once and for all, that's about it. (They) don't agree, definitely don't want it settled, which means they'll have to agree with what others are proposing," he said.

To a suggestion that the long overdue water talks would have to be settled by the future Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Dr Mahathir said: "Well...most probably. It's all right. It's the same government, only different heads."

On whether both governments would renew the water talks, he said there was nothing at the moment.

"No proposal because you can't reach an agreement. They've made it public like that it has made it difficult for us to talk, writing a letter is now difficult. They'll use (letters) as evidence against you...anything you say," he said.

On whether Malaysia would bring up the matter to the court such as the International Court of Justice, the Prime Minister said it could be brought to the court but what was really important now was to explain Malaysia's side of the story.

-- BERNAMA

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