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Article takes issue with PM over reply to Jayakumar

By Balan Moses

"A COUNTRY's independence cannot be given", read the headline of a story in The Straits Times of Singapore on Sunday which took issue with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his reply to a statement by Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar.

The comment piece by Janadas Devan lashed out at the Prime Minister for what he alleged was "an astonishing performance".

Ostensibly an analytical assessment of Dr Mahathir's statement, the piece did little in this respect besides calling into question the veracity of Dr Mahathir's statements.

The writer began by making light of Dr Mahathir's statement that the Singapore Government was trying to divert the attention of Singaporeans from the poor performance of their economy by picking a quarrel with Malaysia. He proceeded to state that readers should read between the lines as "people on both sides of the Causeway may have missed what he did not say, which was more important than what he did say".

Dr Mahathir's so-called ameliorated tone in the recent past was highlighted, the writer noting that no mention was made of "war", "bloody nose" or changing Malaysian laws "to nullify the water agreements".

In another report Li-Ann Wee quoted Environment Minister Lim Swee Say as saying that Singaporeans need not worry about not having enough water.

"If need be, Singapore can be self-sufficient in water by 2061, when the second of the two water agreements with Malaysia expires."

On another subject, a piece in the newspaper yesterday threw light on why Singaporeans were reluctant to start families.

"Seven out of 10 people say free medical care for mother and child is a more important perk than money (17 per cent) when coaxing young couples to have a baby," said the article.

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