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Singapore's RM662m profit (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - In a move to counter Singapore's allegations on the water dispute, the Government is placing advertisements in local newspapers which reveal that the republic made a whopping RM662.5 million profit in 2001 from the raw water supplied by Malaysia.

The city state only paid RM2.39 million for the water sourced from Johor.

The advertisements, the first in a series, will appear tomorrow (see page 5).

A booklet will also be published as Malaysia shifts into high gear to correct the misconceptions and allegations made by the Singapore Government in its publication entitled "Water Talks? If Only It Could".

Titled "Water: The Singapore-Malaysia Dispute - The Facts", the advertisements by the National Economic Action Council declared that Malaysia was duty-bound to respond to the allegations.

"The Singapore Government has gone all over the world and tarnished the name of Malaysia. It is time to set the record straight."

The full-page advertisement ends with the clincher, "Malaysia gets nothing. Singapore gets rich".

NEAC executive director Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, in a statement today, said the aim of the advertisements and booklet was to inform the public of the actual situation pertaining to the stalled discussions on the supply of water to the republic.

Mustapa said it was based on the need to correct the misconceptions and allegations contained in the propaganda booklet published by Singapore's Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

"The advertisements and booklet will highlight the fact that what we have been asking for is a fair price for our water, instead of the current ridiculous price of three sen per 1,000 gallons.

"They will also reveal that Singapore has been making huge sums of money from the water it gets from Johor."

Malaysians, Singaporeans and foreigners, said Mustapa, needed to know the truth.

In the booklet, Singapore comes under fire for publishing extracts of official correspondence between leaders of the two countries on the water issue.

The issue first came to a boil when the letters and correspondence were published in Singapore's The Straits Times.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said recently that Malaysia was entitled to present its version of events through the publication of a booklet or having the facts published in newspapers.

"We will have to explain every point. We will give our version of the problem," he had said when asked whether Malaysia would publish its side of the story.

The disproportionate profit made by Singapore is one of several points which the Government will emphasise in the advertisements and booklet.

Dr Mahathir ruled out Malaysia emulating Singapore's move in publishing letters and official correspondence between the two countries, saying it would be unethical.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia adhered strictly to international practice, which regarded private letters and correspondence between governments as confidential.

Negotiations between ministers and senior officials of the two countries on several occasions for a new price failed to make much progress.

The Prime Minister also said he was not hopeful of resolving the water dispute before he steps down in October because Singapore had failed to accept the reality that the price it was currently paying Malaysia "was too low and unrealistic".