

PM raises 'controversial' matters during bilateral talks with Singapore

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By Massita Ahmad

SINGAPORE, Nov 12 (Bernama) – The 1962 water agreement was one of the matters that was raised during the bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong here today.

“We raised some of the issues in the past which were regarded as controversial,” Dr Mahathir told reporters on the sidelines of a high-tea event with the Malaysian diaspora here.

“I thought I have to state our stand on it. I think by and large, he (Lee) was quite accommodating. He listened to my views and I think he is much open to discuss these things than before... before they just rejected all efforts at renegotiating,” he said.

Asked further whether Singapore agreed to revise the current price, Dr Mahathir said : “They didn’t say they agree but at least they appear to be willing to state their case and for us to state our case.”

As to what will be the next step, he said that some officials will meet and discuss.

Issues on the agreement resurfaced in the middle of this year as Dr Mahathir criticised the price of raw water sold to Singapore as “ridiculous” and said he planned to renegotiate its terms.

The water agreement, which expires in 2061, entitles Singapore to draw up to 250 million gallons a day (mgd) of raw water from the Johor River.

The city-state pays 3.0 sen per thousand gallons of raw water, and sells treated water back to Johor at 50 sen per thousand gallons.

Johor, meanwhile, is entitled to a daily supply of treated water of up to 2.0 per cent or 5.0 mgd of the water supplied to the republic.

According to Dr Mahathir, another issue that was discussed was on the Singapore's Central Provident Fund but did not elaborate further.

It is believed that the CPF issue is related to the difficulties faced by many Malaysians who have left the republic for more than a decade after working there but are unable to withdraw their (CPF) savings.

To a question whether he put forward the third bridge proposal, Dr Mahathir said : "I didn't."

Dr Mahathir is in the island city-state for a two-day official visit, during which which he will join nine other heads of government for the 33rd ASEAN Summit and Related Meetings.

His visit to the republic is at the invitation of Prime Minister Lee, where the two leaders sat together for the first time for the bilateral meeting which was held at The Istana early today.

The visit is part of Dr Mahathir's high-level introductory visits to ASEAN countries after being sworn in as the 7th Prime Minister of Malaysia in May. His coalition Pakatan Harapan ousted the Barisan Nasional, which had been in power in Malaysia for six decades, in the 14th general election on May 14.

This is the second time Dr Mahathir, 93, has become the prime minister of the Malaysia, The first was from 1981 to 2003 when he was with the Barisan Nasional.

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