

Dr M has sense of reality

MR LEE described Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohd as a leader with a grasp of the realities of superpower politics.

Mr Lee said he had read a report in *The Washington Post* quoting Dr Mahathir as saying that it was premature for the United States to consider withdrawing from bases in the Philippines.

In that report, Dr Mahathir was also quoted as saying that a reduction of the US presence should come gradually and in response to specific Soviet steps.

"I was impressed and cheered when I read Dr

Mahathir in *The Washington Post*. That is a leader," he said.

"He understands the ideal state: peace, freedom, neutrality. Why fight? Let's all live, let's compete, produce, sell to each other - everybody does well.

"But the reality makes him say 'stay'."

He added: "But not everybody in Malaysia has got the courage of Dr Mahathir. You know, maybe perhaps it is not just courage, it is also the sense of reality which he has shown.

"Hence, we have been having a barrage of advice on what we should do."

Mr Lee, who was referring to reactions to Singapore's offer to host some US military facilities, said he read these very carefully - who said what, where it was said, how it was said - and then assessed and learned something from it.

"In issues such as this, we take note of everything that's said publicly, but more important, we make sure that there is no misunderstanding between Governments."

He said this issue was discussed between him and Dr Mahathir when they met recently in Brunei.

Said Mr Lee: "He had earlier sent me a message, to which I had responded.

"The message was: Is it true that Singapore will have thousands of US servicemen in Singapore from Jan 1, 1990, and that a defence pact was being planned?"

"So I responded. And when I met him, I debunked that report.

"And he, as an experienced political campaigner, understood easily that the PAP Government would lose votes massively if there were thousands of US servicemen in Singapore, causing friction with the local population. Singapore is a small island.

"And he nodded his head when I rebutted." ST