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Abdullah-Singapore

FOREIGN MINISTER CONVEYS UMNO STAND TO SINGAPORE

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 9 (Bernama) -- Singapore has been informed that Umno felt offended and viewed seriously the statements of the republic's leaders which insinuated that there is no meritocracy in Malaysia.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today conveyed the message to Singapore High Commissioner here Encik Low Choon Ming who was called to Wisma Putra.

Abdullah told reporters later that he also spoke by telephone to his Singapore counterpart S. Jayakumar on the matter.

During the telephone conversation, Jayakumar informed Abdullah that he would forward the message to the Singapore government.

Abdullah spoke to reporters after a meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the visiting Czech Republic premier Vaclav Klaus.

"I called in the Singapore High Commissioner to my office and informed him that the Umno Supreme Council viewed seriously the statements made by Singapore leaders which insinuated that there is no meritocracy in Malaysia," he said.

Abdullah said he conveyed the matter on behalf of Umno and not the government.

Asked why he did so, he said: "Umno is a major member of BN which is also the government party."

He said the Umno Supreme Council felt that the statements by the Singapore leaders constituted a criticism of the internal affairs of a country.

Abdullah said the Umno Supreme Council felt "very slighted by those statements".

The remerger issue surfaced in June when Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew said in reply to a question at a media gathering that he did not discount the possibility of Singapore reemerging with Malaysia one day in the future.

Subsequent statements by other leaders of Singapore appeared to imply that Malaysia did not practise meritocracy.

Abdullah said: "If Singapore values good relations with Malaysia, I hope Singapore will always be sensitive to the feelings of Malaysians."

Asked whether the statements by Singapore leaders might have been misinterpreted by Umno, he said: "I don't see there is any misinterpretation."

Abdullah said he read copies of the statements brought by the High Commissioner to their meeting at Wisma Putra.

He said Singaporeans might see it as a case of misinterpretation but the statements of their leaders clearly insinuated there is no meritocracy in Malaysia.

Asked what was conveyed by the Singapore Foreign Minister during their telephone conversation, he said Jayakumar reiterated the clarification by Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong who also spoke of the need for the two countries to take into account their respective feelings before making any statements.

Asked how it could be ensured the matter would not be repeated, Abdullah said it was left to the wisdom of Singapore in handling the issue so that the good ties between the two countries could continue. -- BERNAMA

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