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Goh-Malaysia

GOH PUZZLED BY MALAYSIAN REACTION TO RE-MERGER ISSUE

SINGAPORE, Sept 8 (Bernama) -- Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong tonight said he is puzzled and is trying to understand why statements made in the republic on the prospect of a re-merger were misinterpreted in Malaysia.

"I did not expect Malaysia to react so harshly because there was never any intention whatsoever on the Singapore leaders' part to provoke the Malaysians or to impugn the Malaysian system of governing," Singapore's electronic media reported Goh as saying in reply to reporters' questions.

On Friday, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad hit out at Singapore leaders for using Malaysia as a "bogeyman" to make its people strive for greater development.

He said comments by the leaders that the republic might be forced to re-merge with Malaysia if Singaporeans failed or become weak were insincere and intended to frighten Singaporeans as it tried to show Malaysia was bad for not practising meritocracy.

Mahathir, who was speaking to reporters after an Umno supreme council meeting, stressed that his statement was in his capacity as the leader of Umno and not on behalf of the government.

Goh said when he raised the re-merger issue in his national day rally speech, it was done with good intention and not to scare anybody.

"There was no reason for Singapore to use Malaysia as a "bogeyman", he said, and repeated that the re-merger issue was not on his political agenda.

Goh said Malaysia was doing well and Singapore had tremendous respect for Malaysia's achievements as well as for Dr Mahathir as a leader.

He added that Singapore was trying to work with Malaysia on several projects.

"And more importantly why should we want to sour relation with Malaysia," he said. -- BERNAMA

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