

31/03/1997

Abdullah: S'pore PM's remarks `positive'

MALAYSIA sees as "positive" the remarks by Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong seeking to restore and improve cooperation between the two countries.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday he viewed Goh's statement as a positive development in a bilateral relationship that has hit a rough patch over a disparaging statement on Johor by Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

"Bilateral ties would return to normalise over time once Malaysians got the better of their feelings over Lee's disparaging remarks on Johor," Bernama quoted Abdullah as saying after opening a rural library in his parliamentary constituency, Kepala Batas, Penang.

On Saturday, Goh said the republic will do its part to restore and improve cooperation at a pace Malaysia is comfortable with. "I welcome Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's assurance that media reports of a Malaysian Cabinet decision to freeze Malaysia-Singapore relations are not true," Goh said in a statement.

Dr Mahathir had said in Osaka last Friday that reports of the freeze by the local media were untrue. The Prime Minister was in Japan on an official visit when the Cabinet last Wednesday reportedly froze new dealings with the republic.

Anwar, who chaired the March 26 Cabinet, also said on Friday that what was decided was to reaffirm the March 19 decision by the Cabinet. But he also said he understood why several Cabinet ministers had called for a freeze in ties with Singapore.

On March 19, the Cabinet decided to accept Lee's apology and his subsequent move to expunge the disparaging remarks from a sworn affidavit filed at a Singapore court in January. In the affidavit, Lee had described Johor as a place "notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings".

Abdullah said Malaysia looks forward to a positive development in Malaysia-Singapore relations, adding that diplomatic ties between the two countries had never ceased.

Asked whether he would be meeting Singapore leaders on the matter, the Foreign Minister said he had no plan to do so.

However, Abdullah, who will be attending the upcoming Non-Aligned Movement conference in New Delhi, said he was willing to meet his Singapore counterpart there if there was a need.

(END)