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Malaysia-Kuan Yew (Roundup)

CABINET TO DECIDE ON MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE ROW OVER KUAN YEW

KUALA LUMPUR, March 18 (Bernama) -- The Cabinet weekly meeting tomorrow will be much awaited as it will decide whether the week-old diplomatic furore between Malaysia and Singapore will be laid to rest.

Since the row broke out following Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's derogatory statement on Johor, the former Singapore premier has tendered an unreserved apology and moved to expunge his remarks which were contained in a court affidavit.

However, it remains to be seen if the government will accept Lee's overtures after his description of Johor as being "notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings" in the affidavit filed in his defamation suit against Singapore opposition figure Tang Liang Hong on Jan 27.

Today, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad deferred comment when asked on Lee's statement yesterday that he had instructed his lawyers to seek the court's permission to delete "the offending sentences" from the affidavit.

"We will tell you after the Cabinet meeting tomorrow," said a smiling Dr Mahathir when asked if he was happy with Lee's statement.

Speaking to reporters in Jerantut before leaving for Kuala Lumpur after a two-visit to Pahang, the Prime Minister said he was informed of Lee's latest move through a letter sent to him last night.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, however, remains unsatisfied.

"Is this also the stand adopted by Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong?," he said to reporters after opening a seminar on "Malaysia and Canada Working Together in Smart Partnership" in Johor Baharu.

Abdul Ghani said: "We believe that Malaysians in general and the Johor people in particular want to know the stand taken by Hsien Loong (on this matter)."

The affidavit was filed in a defamation suit by Lee and his son Hsien Loong who are the first and second plaintiffs in a defamation suit against Singapore opposition figure Tang Liang Hong.

Tang crossed the Causeway to Johor after being defeated in the recent Singapore general election alleging that he had received death threats.

Asked whether the positive attitude of the majority of the people of Singapore towards their neighbouring country had eroded, the Menteri Besar said: "This matter began in the 60s during the period following separation. It recurred last year and again this year."

Abdul Ghani would, however, wait for the outcome of the Cabinet meeting.

In his own statement yesterday, Lee repeated his unreserved apology. He said it was never his intention to cause offence and he had instructed his counsel to seek the court's permission to have the offending sentences deleted.

Lee had apologised before this through a statement by his press secretary but he failed to quell the outrage among government leaders and politicians who said Lee should retract his insulting remarks on Johor as well to indicate his sincerity.

In Kuala Terengganu, Umno Youth Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi welcomed Lee's latest move and said the movement did not want the issue to be prolonged.

"We hope what happened will serve as a lesson to everyone and the spirit of good neighbourliness should be upheld," he said and expressed the hope that relations between Singapore and Malaysia would continue to be

strengthened.

Opposition leader and DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang also welcomed Lee's action and said it should put to rest an unpleasant episode in Malaysia-Singapore relations. -- BERNAMA

TEAM RM