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Kuan Yew-Diplomats

DIPLOMATS IN GENEVA SURPRISED AT LEE'S STATEMENT

KUALA LUMPUR, March 15 (Bernama) -- Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's derogatory statement over Johor has surprised many diplomats in Geneva, said deputy Umno Youth head Datuk Hishamuddin Tun Hussein who is attending the United Nations Commission on Human Rights conference there.

Many of the diplomats, who are familiar with Malaysia and having been here before, know that Lee's statement is "totally nonsensical and illogical", he said in a statement issued by his office here today.

Hishamuddin, son of former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn, is also Johor Umno information chief, MP for Tenggara and Parliamentary Secretary for the International Trade and Industry Ministry.

Hishamuddin said he was shocked to hear of Lee's statement on CNN and many diplomats in Geneva registered their surprise at the "baseless, irresponsible and unfounded accusations."

"On my part, (the) statements are entirely uncalled for, derogatory in their tone and totally unsuitable for a man who is supposed to be an Asian statesman and a friend of Malaysia," said Hishamuddin.

Bearing in mind the unique relation between Malaysia and Singapore, Lee should also personally apologise to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, he added.

Hishamuddin said that while Lee had apologised unreservedly through his press secretary, he should also retract the offending statement contained in a Jan 27 affidavit which Lee had filed in a defamation suit against Singapore opposition figure Tang Liang Hong.

In the affidavit, Lee described Johor as a place "notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings". Tang, who lost in the recent Singapore general election, went to Johor after that alleging that death threats had been made against him in the republic.

Hishamuddin said this was the second time in less than a year that Lee had used Malaysia for his own ends and he had gone "too far" this time.

"We are not here as a bogey man every time he faces a general election nor are we here to be used as a punching bag everytime he faces a personal confrontation with a fellow Singaporean," he said.

"As a young Malaysian leader, I am disappointed in (the) Senior Minister's statement especially at a time when the youth in both countries are trying so hard to build bridges. He has set a very bad example especially for the youth who will still be here when he is long gone," said Hishamuddin, adding that he, for one, had lost a lot of respect for the former Singapore premier.

Meanwhile, Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang said Lee should make an unqualified retraction of the affidavit because the context in which his apology was made was unsatisfactory.

The DAP Secretary-General said the explanations by Lee's press secretary that the affidavit was not meant to be made public and that it was based on Lee's perception of Johor from press reports was akin to rubbing salt in the wounds opened by Lee.

These could not be mitigating factors and Lee himself would have been the first to reject them if the tables were turned, said Lim.

"While waiting for Lee to make an unqualified retraction of his derogatory reference to Johor, let Malaysians show that there is something for Singapore to learn from Malaysia - that we value human dignity with a premium for magnanimity rather than vindictiveness or vengefulness as well

as international good neighbourliness," he added.
-- BERNAMA
TCL ABG