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Dr M to wait for Cabinet meeting

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KANGAR, Sat. - Although Malaysians continue to react against Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's unflattering remarks about Johor Baru, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad refused to be drawn into making further statements.

"I don't want to talk ... I will have to wait for the Cabinet meeting," he said when asked for his comments on public views on the issue.

"The people's views have already been reported in the media. "Takkan nak buat referendum? (Do we need a referendum?)," he said at the end of a day-long official visit to Perlis.

Lee, in a sworn affidavit done privately in chambers but which the Press made public, had described Johor as a place "notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings."

The controversial statement, part of the defamation suit Lee and his son Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong filed against Singapore Opposition leader Tang Liang Hong, drew severe reaction from the Cabinet, political and business leaders who called for a public apology and a retraction of the words in the affidavit.

Lee, through his Press secretary, apologised unreservedly to the Government and people of Malaysia but nowhere in the seven-point statement did he retract the very words that triggered the whole backlash.

Asked whether Singapore had responded to Malaysia's aide memoire which expressed the Government's concern in the issue, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know. I have to wait for the report from the Foreign Minister."

The aide memoire was handed to acting Singapore High Commissioner Vanu Gopala Menon when the latter was summoned to Wisma Putra on Wednesday.

He also responded to reporters' questions related to Human Resource Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek's advice to Malaysians working in Singapore to return home if their contribution was unappreciated by Singapore.

"The Government will not stop Malaysians from continue to work in Singapore," Dr Mahathir said. "Our workers are free to work anywhere. If they feel that they are getting better income by working in Singapore, we will not stop them.

"And we will also not stop them if they decide to return home."

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