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MB: We treat Tang as any other Singaporean

JOHOR BARU, Fri. - The State Government is according Singapore Opposition politician Tang Liang Hong the same treatment as any other Singaporean on a social visit here, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said today.

As for the duration of Tang's stay, he said the State would leave it to the Immigration Department to decide.

"As far as we are concerned, he is on a social visit here. I imagine Malaysia would treat him as a Singaporean who is making a social visit," Ghani told reporters after sending off Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Sultan Ismail Airport in Senai.

Dr Mahathir left for Kuala Lumpur after a two-day visit to Johor.

Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister had an audience with the Sultan of Johor at the Istana Bukit Serene.

Tang, who is in Johor, faces defamation suits filed by Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew and several other members of the Singapore Cabinet. Tang had expressed fears over his safety if he returned to Singapore now.

Ghani said he was not sure how long Tang was permitted to stay under the Immigration rules agreed by Asean countries. "This, I leave it to the Immigration (authorities)."

On bilateral relations with Singapore, in the wake of Lee's remarks describing Johor as a place "notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings (Lee had since apologised for the remarks), Ghani said he would adopt a pragmatic attitude in dealing with whatever activities that took place in Johor and the republic, in particular with regard to economic matters.

The Menteri Besar concurred with Dr Mahathir's point that Malaysia had wanted to be friendly, and friendliness had to be reciprocated.

As for his recent visit to Singapore, Ghani said that it was part of Johor's commitment to the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle, adding that he had also visited Sumatra and Riau in Indonesia.

"I went to Singapore within the context of Sijori (Singapore, Johor and Riau) collaboration. I went to Sumatra as well as Riau last year. So, we completed Johor's commitment to Sijori with the visit to Singapore early this year.

"We entertain the synergies that can be found within the context of a regional framework like Sijori. I think we will remain pragmatic about that kind of collaboration," he said.

On Lee's remarks portraying Johor as crime-ridden, Ghani said many Singaporeans "had come and gone, and many had invested here.

"Despite the RM100,000 levy (on each transaction), they still buy properties within the quota given by the State Government," he said.

Ghani said this proved that Johor must be a safe and secure place for investors and tourists.

"Let this (Lee's remarks) be a lesson in what it means to be neighbourly, and to learn to be sensitive instead of hurting others as one wishes."

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