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Zahid-Singapore

HSIEN LOONG'S TURN TO APOLOGISE, SAYS UMNO YOUTH

KUALA LUMPUR, March 20 (Bernama) -- Umno Youth today demanded a public apology from Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Brig-Gen Lee Hsien Loong with regards to an affidavit discrediting Johor filed jointly with his father Lee Kuan Yew, who is the republic's Senior Minister.

Its leader Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi also said that the movement was firm to proceed with its action to file a suit against the senior Lee for his offending remarks in his sworn affidavit filed in a Singapore High Court on Jan 27.

However, it would depend on the advice of its legal advisers as to whether the movement had the locus standi to go ahead with the action, he told a news conference here.

Ahmad Zahid, however, said the court action might be taken by "those linked to Johor" and not necessarily Umno Youth.

Yesterday, the Cabinet formally accepted Lee Kuan Yew's unreserved apology and his offer to retract his disparaging remarks on Johor but said the restoration of the old level of relationship would take time.

Lee had described Johor "notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings" in his affidavit against an opposition politician Tang Liang Hong who fled to Johor after losing in the republic's general election claiming that he received death threats.

Lee and his son Hsien Loong are plaintiffs in the suit.

Reading out a statement, Ahmad Zahid said Umno Youth's demand for a public apology from Hsien Loong was not intended to re-open an issue which many considered settle.

"But we want to stress on the movement's stand that the remarks which severely offended Malaysians should not be viewed lightly by Singapore leaders," he said.

He said the movement also regretted Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar's statement that Singapore was surprised with the Malaysian Government's stand that the restoration of the old level of relationship would take time.

"The Foreign Minister should not try to teach Malaysia on how to establish diplomatic ties. His shocking statement showed how the republic's leaders failed to value the historical ties between the two countries," he said.

"As a neighbouring country, it is hard for us to accept the reality that our closest neighbour has stabbed from the back," he said.

Ahmad Zahid also said Umno Youth could not accept the fact that there were double standards in Lee's actions, one in his personal capacity and the other as Senior Minister.

He said Singapore should learn from Malaysian leaders who had not made statements in their personal capacity on issues involving bilateral relations.

"Malaysian leaders understand the fundamentals of diplomatic relations and in fact, respected ties with any neighbouring country," he said.

Ahmad Zahid said Lee Kuan Yew should realise that his heydays as among the prominent figures in this region had ended and now is Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's era. -- BERNAMA

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