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Mahathir-Singapore

KUAN YEW'S STATEMENT A SERIOUS MATTER, SAYS MAHATHIR

JOHOR BHARU, March 13 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad today described as "a serious matter" the statement by Singapore Senior Minister and former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew that Johor is a place "notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings."

The Prime Minister said that some amends "should be made in some way or other."

"It appears that many Malaysians wish that the Singaporean leader make an apology," he told reporters here when asked to comment on Lee's statement made in a sworn affidavit filed in a Singapore court in connection with the defamation suit he and his son, Lee Hsien Loong, brought against Singapore Opposition politician Tang Liang Hong.

Dr Mahathir is on a two-day visit to Johor.

Leaders of political parties including those of the opposition and social organisations have expressed shock and displeasure over the statement and have condemned Lee.

The Cabinet, at its weekly meeting yesterday, wanted Lee to retract his statement and apologise for the callous remarks.

Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia has always had problems with Singapore although the public does not know very much about it.

"We always have this problem but we want to have friendly relations," he said.

"However, to have friendly relations with Singapore requires considerable effort as sometimes things are said and done which made it difficult to be friendly," he added.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after witnessing the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Johor Corporation and Titan Himont in Senai, near here, for the leasing of an industrial land in Tanjung Langsat Industrial area.

In the affidavit filed on Jan 27, Lee has said that he was baffled why Tang had fled to Johor when he feared for his safety in Singapore.

"Of all places, he (Tang) went to Johor. That place is notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings. It does not make any sense for a person who claims to be fearful for his life to go to a place like Johor," Lee said in his affidavit.

Tang fled Singapore immediately after his defeat in the Jan 3 general election, citing death threats against him and his family.

Asked by a foreign news agency reporter whether Malaysia should let the matter go, he said: "I don't know, why don't you ask others."

He said Singapore should appreciate the feelings of Malaysians as many Singaporeans too feel safe to be in Malaysia particularly in Johor.

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He said Singapore should appreciate the feelings of Malaysians as many Singaporeans too feel safe to be in Malaysia particularly in Johor.

Asked whether there was truth in Lee's statement, he said: "I feel safe and you feel safe, don't you feel safe?. Nobody is hijacking your car."

Dr Mahathir said crime happened anywhere and that the rate in some other countries was even worse.

Dr Mahathir, however refused to make any comment about Singapore when asked what he felt about the republic's crime situation.

Asked how Lee's statement can affect relations between Singapore and Malaysia, he said: "I don't know, we'll see."

Asked whether Lee had telephoned him over the matter, he said: "I don't expect him to call me."

When a reporter stated that Singapore had previously made remarks that upset the Malaysian government and asked what sort of action can be taken, Dr Mahathir said: "I can't remember the past actions...I don't want to make any comment but you can see the feelings of the people here."

"Even Singaporeans come here to invest and buy lots of food and they feel safe here. Should they be given the chance to buy a lot of petrol here, they would."

Asked on his personal feelings over the matter he said: "My feelings are private."

Asked what would happen if Lee does not apologise, he said: "I don't know."

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