

26 MAR 1997

Cabinet-Singapore

MALAYSIA FREEZES FRESH BILATERAL DEALINGS WITH SINGAPORE

KUALA LUMPUR, March 26 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today decided to freeze fresh bilateral dealings with Singapore in the wake of recent developments following Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew's derogatory remarks over Johor.

This was decided at the weekly Cabinet meeting chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today.

This was confirmed by several ministers when contacted.

One minister, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the Cabinet decided to cool off ties for a while in terms of bilateral talks "or anything to do with Singapore".

Any existing bilateral talks will also be postponed for now.

Another minister said government-to-government contacts, meetings between ruling political parties and awarding of contracts to Singapore companies would also be affected.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is currently on a four-day official visit to Japan. Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is accompanying him.

The same minister said today's Cabinet decision was prompted by the subsequent remarks or reaction from across the Causeway, in particular by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and Foreign Minister S.Jayakumar, after the Malaysian government announced that it accepted Lee's unreserved apology for describing Johor as "notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings".

Abdullah announced after last Wednesday's Cabinet meeting that although the government accepted Lee's apology, it would take time to restore the relationship to the old level.

Radio Corporation of Singapore reported the same day that Jayakumar expressed surprise at the Malaysian government's statement because Lee's remarks on Johor was made by Lee personally in his action against Singapore opposition figure, Tang Liang Hong.

Jayakumar said Lee was suing Tang in his private capacity to defend his personal reputation and to enforce his personal rights.

Lee's remarks on Johor were contained in an affidavit in his defamation suit filed against Tang by him and his son, Hsien Loong, who is also Singapore Deputy Premier.

After making known his apology through his press secretary, Lee later issued a personal statement in which he repeated his unreserved apology and said he had instructed his lawyer to delete the offending statements from the affidavit.

Yesterday, Goh was reported by Radio Corporation of Singapore as saying relations between Malaysia and Singapore should move on following the Malaysian Cabinet's acceptance of Lee's apology.

Goh blamed differences between the two countries on inaccurate newspaper reports and said the inaccuracies would be resolved in due course.

He also said that even though Singapore would take steps to restore ties, the pace would largely be determined by Malaysia.

Goh even quoted a Malay proverb saying that water could not be separated even by a knife to describe the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore as the interests of both were intertwined.

Goh also said there would be more links between Johor and Singapore and

the republic was also keen to act on Malaysia's plans for a bridge to replace the existing Causeway if the Singapore government was approached on an official basis. -- BERNAMA

TM RM