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PM: Don't take us for granted (HL)

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JOHOR BARU, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told Singapore today not to take Malaysia's good naturedness for granted, saying the republic should be more considerate in its dealings with neighbours.

"I have no intention to incite the people's feelings. But facts are facts. (They should) be more considerate... We have been considerate," he said when addressing a capacity crowd comprising Umno and Barisan Nasional leaders, community chiefs, government officials and members of organisations at the city council indoor stadium.

Dr Mahathir said this in reference to Singapore's directive that Malaysia relocate its Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) checkpoint at Tanjong Pagar railway station to Woodlands.

He said Malaysia had always adopted a "prosper thy neighbour" policy as it realised that when a country gets rich, its neighbours would not have problems.

"That is why we are upset when there is tension between us and Singapore," he said.

This is the fourth leg of the Prime Minister's visit to the States to meet Umno leaders and explain to the people the Government's efforts to overcome the country's economic problems. He started with Kedah, followed by Malacca and Negri Sembilan.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president and BN chairman, said Malaysia had always tried its best to have a good relationship with Singapore.

"I have met their leaders to maintain good bilateral relations, but what do we get in return? (They) ask our (Immigration and Customs) officers to leave (the Tanjong Pagar train station)."

Singapore, which relocated its CIQ facilities to a new rail checkpoint in Woodlands on Saturday, had said the Malaysian Immigration would cease to have any authority to perform its functions at Tanjong Pagar once Singapore Immigration was no longer present to lend its authority.

But despite the strong warning, Malaysia had remained firm in its decision not to relocate.

The crowd gave Dr Mahathir a spirited ovation when he spoke of Singapore's shabby treatment of Malaysia.

In the context of the relocation of the CIQ facilities, Dr Mahathir asked: "By Malaysia having two or three offices in Singapore will this cause such a major problem to the republic?"

The offices had been there for a long time on land owned by Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia meant no harm to others, adding that Malaysians would like to be friends with everyone.

"But do not take for granted our good naturedness. I do not want to say anything more, but ... Hear! Hear! Hear!" he said.

On Friday, Singapore parliamentarians had responded with a chorus of 'hear, hear, hear', when Opposition Member of Parliament Low Thia Khiang had asked why an independent Singapore should allow Malaysia to even have space in Woodlands.

Earlier, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, on behalf of the people of Johor, pledged their support to the Government in overcoming the economic problems.

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