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Kuan Yew's book draws flak from Malaysia

JOHOR BARU, Mon. - Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu today refuted a claim by Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew that Malaysia had been "bullying" the island by threatening to terminate its two water agreements with the republic.

Samy Vellu said Malaysia had no intention of repudiating its water accords with Singapore which will end in 2011 and 2061.

"When Malaysia signs an agreement with another country, we stand by it. This claim by Lee is, therefore, totally unwarranted.

"Even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said that Malaysia will stick to its water agreements with Singapore. If Singapore feels threatened, they have been totally misled.

"Malaysia is not in the habit of bullying other countries. The reality is that we are being bullied by others," he told reporters after opening the Medilink Pharmacy at the Johor MIC building.

Samy Vellu was commenting on a soon-to-be released memoirs in which Lee is quoted as saying that Malaysia had used the water issue to bully and threaten Singapore.

The Sunday Times of Singapore published extracts from the memoirs yesterday, with a sidebar under the heading the "Tunku's water supply threat".

Lee claimed in the extract that Malaysia's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman did not only push for Singapore's separation from Malaysia, but had also wanted to control Singapore through the supply of water from Johor and by exerting other levers of pressure.

Lee is also quoted as saying in the memoirs that Tunku had told the then Britain's High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, Antony Head, that if Singapore's foreign policy was prejudicial to Malaysia's interests, Malaysia could always bring pressure to bear on the republic by "threatening to turn off the water in Johor".

In Machang, Bernama reports Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak as saying Malaysia had never used the water supply issue to pressure Singapore.

He said it was Singapore which had dwelled on the issue until it was unable to separate it from other issues.

"We do not act hastily nor are we inhuman but we want to safeguard Malaysia's interests in everything that we do and negotiate with Singapore," he said.

Najib said Singapore should look at every problem rationally and realise that neighbours must have a good relationship.

Malaysia would not take hasty action against its neighbours, including Singapore.

"They should look at the wider perspective and not just want to win all the time. What is important is not to hurt its neighbours' feelings in any matter that arises," Najib said.

He said the country's dignity could not be compromised in any action or decision relating to issues raised by Singapore.

In Kuala Lumpur, Umno Youth views the Lee's memoirs and the timing of its publication as an irresponsible act and an attempt to poison bilateral relations.

Deploring the soon-to-be-published book entitled Singapore Memoirs: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew, Umno Youth deputy chief Datuk Hishammuddin Tun

Hussein said it was unbecoming of a so-called Asean statesman.

"Umno Youth contends that on the basis of the excerpts serialised in the Straits Times yesterday, the book merely reflects one man's highly partisan interpretation of history.

"Selective in its use of sources and deeply biased in its arguments, the book is merely a tool for self-aggrandisement," he said.

He said Lee's refusal to accept any responsibility for the events leading up to the separation of Singapore from Malaysia reinforced these skewed viewpoints and the slandering of deceased Malaysian leaders revealed his total lack of respect.

Without doubt, the separation had proved to be a watershed, colouring many aspects of the two countries' relations, but at this juncture it was crucial for both to turn aside from history and look to the future.

"Our future lies in stressing our mutual strengths and our underlying similarities," he added.

Hishammuddin said Umno Youth encouraged all its divisions to do their own research on the book and to issue a statement based on that research.

Its International Affairs Council and the Johor Umno Youth also proposed that a dialogue be held on the memoirs and another book, *A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement*, by National University of Singapore historian, Dr Albert Lau.

Wanita Umno permanent chairman Tan Sri Aishah Ghani said Lee's rash statement in which he deliberately twisted the fact of history could jeopardise the already strained relations between Malaysia and the Republic.

It was irresponsible of Lee to use racial sentiment as a weapon to disrupt the racial harmony in the country.

"Lee's refusal to admit the fact that Umno, as the pillar of Barisan Nasional, was more qualified to lead the country at the threshold of Merdeka clearly showed his refusal to accept the concept of collective leadership promoted by the coalition.

"His fervour in creating a meritocracy system in the Republic clearly portrayed his attitude in putting the interest of a sector of the society ahead of the majority," she said.

Because of Lee's negative attitude, she said, Singapore has always viewed Malaysia as a potential threat, thus creating unnecessary tension between the two countries.

Lee's attitude, she added, was prompted by his skewed belief that Malaysia which was led by the Malays was not compatible with Singapore which was being led by the Chinese.

A historian, Prof Datuk Dr Khoo Kay Kim of Universiti Malaya, cautioned against rash interpretation of historical fact as this could hurt the sensitivity of many.

"History should be used as a lesson to forge better political ties, especially between close neighbouring countries as this can prevent the recurrence of past mistakes," he added.

He said, as it is now, the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore was already strained and rash statements coming from a veteran leader in the Republic would only worsen the situation.

He said such unfounded prejudice as displayed by Lee should be eliminated and any contentious issue that cropped up should be resolved through rational discussion.

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