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Mahathir-Singapore

MAHATHIR SAYS IT'S NOW DIFFICULT TO BE FRIENDLY WITH S'PORE

By: Azman Ujang

TOKYO, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Calling some of the actions taken by Singapore as unfriendly, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it will now be difficult for Malaysia to be friendly with its neighbouring island nation again.

He said Singapore had taken a series of actions that showed it was not sensitive to being a good neighbour but what hurt the Malaysian people were comments about some of the country's past leaders made by its Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew in his recently published memoirs.

Dr Mahathir said if he wanted, he too could write a lot of "very nasty" things about Singapore but he did not do so as these would annoy Singapore.

But when Lee in his memoirs villified some of Malaysian leaders who had already died, Malaysians felt "very angry" about it, he said.

The prime minister said this in response to questions from the Japanese media in a specially arranged interview here.

Lee in his memoirs, which sparked new strains in relations between the two countries, accuses some past Malaysian leaders of indulging in acts ranging from corruption, vice, and inciting racial tension that caused racial riots in Singapore in 1964.

"I can also write a lot of very nasty things about my experience with Singapore, but we hold ourselves back, but Singapore sometimes says things which hurt us, not just the government but the people.

"Now our past leaders who have already passed away are villified by them (the memoirs), our people feel very angry.

"Even if I want to be friendly, it's now very difficult because people do not want us to be friendly again with Singapore," said Dr Mahathir.

According to Malaysian Ambassador to Japan Tan Sri Khatib Abdul Hamid, the Japanese business community had expressed concern about problems in Malaysia-Singapore ties because of Japan's huge investments in Singapore.

Dr Mahathir said the Malaysian government could not ignore the feelings of the people which had been aroused by Singapore's unfriendly acts.

He cited the move by Singapore banks to offer very high interest rates for deposits in Malaysian ringgit as another "very unfriendly act".

Dr Mahathir said during the present economic troubles, Malaysia needed as much money as possible in its banking system but when Singapore banks took such a measure, the ringgit went out of the country.

Another was when Singapore set up an over-the-counter trading for shares following the separation of the two countries' twin stock exchanges, a move which hurt the Malaysian economy.

"For a long time, we did not complain, but finally of course we have to act," he said obviously referring to Malaysia's recent decision to ban Singapore military planes from flying over its air space.

Other problems between the two countries include the future of the water supply agreement - Singapore gets much of its water from Malaysia - and the Malaysian-owned railway land in Singapore.

-- BERNAMA

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