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Lee-Mahathir

MALAYSIA HAS DIFFERENT VIEW OF AUSTRALIA, SAYS LEE

MELBOURNE, June 7 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has a different view of Australia and has been "an obstacle" to Canberra's attempt to joining regional forums, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said today.

Addressing the National Press Club in Canberra, Lee said he thought it would be good for Australia to become more involved in the region.

"It makes sense for you strategically because then you are linked to a part of the world that has great influence on you," he said.

"It makes sense for us too in Asia because we then broaden our base of prosperity...we are not so much dependent on just Asean's 10 countries.

"And it's not just a matter of geographical broadening, but also broadening the complexion of Asean. So if there's any face-off across the Pacific, it's not between the white man and the rest but on both sides, it's a mixed group.

"Malaysia has a different view. Dr Mahathir in particular has a different view...you said it's a permanent obstacle, well it is an obstacle. How permanent? It depends."

Lee was replying to a question from an Australian journalist who said Malaysia had frequently blackballed Australia's attempts to join regional forums and that Dr Mahathir recently lambasted Australia's attitude over its leading role in East Timor as triumphalist and offensive.

Lee, whose speech was shown live on ABC television, said triumphalist and bias reporting was harming Australia in Asia.

He said Singapore was not alone in Asia in being the victim of biased reporting.

"Malaysia has had its ups and downs. Singapore has had ups and downs. We don't hold against you but we feel a bit sorry that you are not conveying the right perspective to your readers.

"The Australian media has sometimes substituted sensationalism for objective reporting about Asia as a whole. A triumphalist attitude does not serve Australia's interest.

"As Prime Minister John Howard has said, Australia is not on a moral crusade in Asia," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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