

04 SEP 2000

MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE

MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE TIES ON THE MEND SINCE LEE'S VISIT

By: Yong Soo Heong

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 4 (Bernama) -- Malaysia-Singapore bilateral relations are certainly on the mend following the visit of the republic's senior minister, Lee Kuan Yew, to Malaysia early last month.

Lee had advocated at the end of his three-day working visit, more exchanges between the leaders, including those of the younger generation, without fanfare to bring about better understanding between both sides.

There has been a flurry of activity since Lee's visit. Key personalities on both sides of the Causeway have not wasted any time in working towards mending the fences.

Late last month, Singapore's foreign minister Prof. S. Jayakumar came here for a round of golf with his Malaysian counterpart, Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

Tomorrow, about 200 political and business leaders from both sides of the Causeway will attend a one-day Malaysia-Singapore Business Forum 2000 in Singapore. The forum is co-organised by the Kuala Lumpur-based Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (Asli) and Singapore's MoneyWorld Asia Pte.

Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein, Finance Ministry adviser Datuk Mustapa Mohamed and Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange executive chairman Datuk Mohd Azlan Hashim are among the speakers.

Hishammuddin and Singapore's Minister of State for Defence David Lim will share the stage to present their views on the role of the younger generation in revitalising bilateral relationships during the luncheon keynote address.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman and Melaka Chief Minister Datuk Wira Ali Rustam will also highlight investment and business opportunities in their respective states.

Syed Hamid, speaking after his informal meeting with Prof Jayakumar, said there has been a sense of openness and frankness as well as a very clear intention and desire (on the part of Singapore) to develop "our future relationship by not looking at the past but to move forward."

Lee, who described his meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as positive, said, "I spent nearly two hours, originally supposed to be one hour (with Dr Mahathir). (If we are not) talking in a positive way, we would not have gone for so long."

He also said that if both countries could work out the nuts and bolts of their differences, there could be an amicable solution within two to three months.

Malaysia and Singapore ties had been in stalemate in recent years when both sides could not agree on several matters, including the location of the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Complex in the republic, a new water agreement and contributions by Malaysians to the Central Provident Fund.

"There are difficulties, let's sort them out," said Lee who believed that they would be overcome if there was enough give and take on both sides.

Tomorrow's forum also provides an opportunity for the private sector of both countries to work together.

When Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong went on a trip to Europe, the Europeans were especially keen to know about Singapore's relations with Malaysia.

The Europeans had said that if the relations were good, then there

would be synergy between Malaysia and Singapore and there would be more European investments in these two countries.

And Goh said the relations were okay.

When Malaysia celebrated her 43rd birthday recently, Goh sent congratulatory greetings to Dr Mahathir and said he looked forward to working closely with the Malaysian leader and widening the scope of their existing co-operation.

Goh also said Singapore attached great importance to the long standing and multifaceted relations that bonded the two countries.

These words are being swiftly translated into action for both countries to gain from their close co-operation. -- BERNAMA

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