

fair, say leaders

Reaction to Singapore PM's statement

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today if Singaporean Malays were better off than the Malays here, he thanked God for it.

"If the Singaporeans are lucky and their situation is good, *Alhamdulillah*, good for them," he said when asked to comment on the recent statement by Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong that Singaporean Malays were better off than Malaysian Malays.

Goh's remarks made at a gathering of Singapore Malay community leaders have drawn strong reaction from Umno leaders who said it was unfair to compare Malays here with those of the island republic.

Abdullah said the Malay community in Malaysia was a large one and that the Government had done its best for them and wanted them to do better.

He said Bumiputeras in the peninsular, in Sabah and Sarawak represented a very large community.

"We are looking at the performance and achievements of all of them," he told reporters after attending Gerakan's Chinese New Year open house at the party's headquarters here.

Goh's statements, published in the (Singapore) *Straits Times* Monday, said that one out of four Singapore Malay workers possessed upper secondary or higher qualifications last year, while the figure for Malaysian Malays was 14 per cent in 1998.

He also said that last year, 23 per cent of Singapore Malay workers hold administrative, managerial, professional, technical and related jobs, while Malaysian Malays held 16 per cent in 1998.

Goh said the comparison was "one way to see if the Singaporean Malay community here was marginalised, as some Malaysian groups had charged recently."

Abdullah said the Government did not just look at the lot of Malays in urban areas but had to also consider the situation of those Malays in rural areas.

"We are not looking at particularly, those in the Klang Valley. Obviously those in the Klang Valley are

doing very, very much better. Their standard of living and household income as a group are, of course, high.

"But then we are not only concerned about those in the Klang Valley. We are concerned about all our people, all over the country. They may be in remote villages. Their requirements have to be met. It is not easy to bring development to all these places because they are far away," he said.

Abdullah said if one travelled in the countryside, one would see the development that had been brought about and which was intended for all races to progress together.

"The Government's commitment is very high. We work hard to develop our country and, *Alhamdulillah*, we are successful. All races experience a better standard of living than before. We hope that with the new capacity and ability and better facilities we have there will be more progress," he said.

Abdullah further added: "That is his (Goh's) view. If he makes a statement that has no basis and is not in line with information available, of course we will not be happy. Better for us to just ignore. We know better our situation and what we want. We are more confident and believe in what we do to bring about success to our people."

Speaking to Bernama later, he said even though Malays in Malaysia played a big role, non-Malays were also given the opportunity to play a role in all fields of government including the police and military.

"Hence the opportunities created through development of our country are for all races," he said.

In Malaysia, the Malays not only had a big role in defence and administration but are professionals and hold high posts in multinational companies based overseas.

Abdullah said no race in Malaysia was restricted from serving or holding posts in whatever service.

He said development brought about by the Malaysian Government was not just to raise the standard of living of the Malays but to provide quality opportunities to all Malaysians.

Meanwhile, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said Goh's statement was "uncalled for" as the environment in Malaysia was different

compared to that in Singapore.

"Our Malay population is larger than theirs. Thus, it is unfair to make such a comparison," she told reporters after attending Gerakan's Chinese New Year open house here.

Rafidah, who is also the Wanita Umno chief said the Government was constantly carrying out programmes to upgrade the status of Malays in the country.

"We realise that there are some sectors where the Malays do not fare as well as the other races. But we are carrying out activities to change this.

"Although Malaysia and Singapore have the same historical background, we have different development agendas and this should be made a subject of comparison."

In Malacca, Chief Minister Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam said Goh's statement was a move to pacify the Malays and prevent them from going against the Government.

Describing it as an attempt to hide the republic's weaknesses, he said not many Malays in the island republic were enjoying what their counterparts in Malaysia were enjoying.

He said it was very difficult to find many Malays in Singapore holding high-ranking and professional posts like engineers, architects, doctors or pilots.

"I have many relatives there...I know the situation faced by the Malays there.

"I believe this statement could have been made to pacify the Singapore Malays by leading them into believing that they are better off," he said after attending a Chinese New Year gathering organised by the State MCA at the Malacca Municipal Council hall in Ayer Keroh today.

Saying that the statement could cause tension and discontent between the Malays of both countries, Mohd Ali said: "I have met Goh many times...he seems to be a very reasonable man.

"Therefore I am truly shocked that he could say something like this without thinking about its effect on the relationship between both countries," he added.

Meanwhile, Umno Youth exco member Dr Adham Baba said here today that the statement was a political gimmick to win support from the Singaporean Malays.