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PM: Malays in Malaysia are an able lot

JITRA, Thurs. - Malays in Malaysia are not lacking in ability and no one can call them weak or slow, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"They are even willing to sail solo around the world and climb up Mount Everest.

"I believe that no one can call the Malays weak, slow, or say that they are unable to do this or that," he said this when asked to comment on Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's statement that Singaporean Malays were better off than their Malaysian counterparts at a recent gathering of Singapore Malay community leaders.

Refusing to make comparisons between Malays here and those in Singapore, Dr Mahathir said Malays here had proven themselves both willing and able to achieve great things.

"I do not want to comment about the situation of Singaporean Malays. It is another country's problems. I do not want to criticise," he said after attending the Umno Kubang Pasu Hari Raya gathering in Sekolah Menengah Jitra here.

"What we know is that in Malaysia, the Malays are no less capable."

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

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

Goh told a gathering of Singapore Malay community leaders that the comparison was "one way to see if the Malay community here was marginalised as some Malaysian groups had charged recently."

Dr Mahathir said Malays in Malaysia could head the army, carry weapons and defend themselves.

He also cited the fact that many Malays are doctors, lawyers, professors, pilots and chief operating officers of major foreign companies locally and overseas, as proof that Malaysian Malays were a capable lot.

Asked about the comparisons made between the two groups of Malays, Dr Mahathir said:

"If he (Goh Chok Tong) wants to make comparisons, that is up to him ...I do not care.

"I do not want to say anything about it or make comparisons myself."

When asked about the strong reactions from Malaysians to the Singapore Prime Minister's statement, he said they had every right to react to it.

Asked if the issue would sour Malaysia-Singapore relations if it was continually brought up, he said:

"Sometimes it (relations between the two countries) is bad and sometimes good ...relations between two countries are always like that."

Meanwhile in Temerloh, Umno Youth Chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein described the comparison as unfair as there are only 400,000 Malays in Singapore while there are 13.5 million in Malaysia.

"I feel that the facts used in saying that the Malays in Singapore are better off compared to the Malays here is not reasonable to strengthen Goh's statement," he said after chairing the State Umno Youth meeting at the Temerloh Umno building.

"If the Singapore Prime Minister has any problem related to the development of Malays in the Republic, he (Goh) should not look at the Malays in Malaysia and use baseless facts to make a comparison.

"We in the Umno Youth have also also outlined certain facts which can also be used as a comparison between the Malay community in Singapore and Malaysia."

Hishammuddin said if Singapore were to make a comparison, it should be made in terms of the number of Malays holding the highest position in the Government of a country or the private sector or even on the highest equity held in a company.

"The comparison should also be made according to the number of Malays in both countries and also on the status of Malays in urban and rural areas."

In Kota Baru, Umno Supreme Council member Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah said comparisons between the Malays in Singapore and Malaysia should not have been made as they are in different situations.

"The Malays in Singapore are a minority while in Malaysia they are the majority and given special attention," he said.

Tengku Razaleigh, who is Gua Musang MP, said the Malays in Malaysia have made a lot of achievements in the various fields compared to 20 years ago.

"I'm proud. The Malays (in Malaysia) are more confident and they have progressed tremendously, excelling in various fields including education, social and also economy."

In Seremban, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad said Goh's statement could affect ties between Malaysia and Singapore.

He said the comparison was unfair and could strain bilateral ties.

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