

15 MAR 2002

Lee-Malaysia

MORE BENEFICIAL IF LESS HICCUPS IN S'PORE-M'SIA TIES, SAYS LEE

SINGAPORE, March 15 (Bernama) -- Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who ended a four-day visit to Malaysia yesterday, said the two countries would benefit more if there were less ups and downs in ties, according to media reports.

"I hope it will improve over time, but I don't see a sudden, dramatic, qualitative change," he was quoted by the Straits Times newspaper as saying at a news conference for the Singapore media at a hill resort outside the Malaysian capital.

On Malaysia taking issue with the republic's land reclamation in the Straits of Johor separating the two countries, Lee reiterated that Singapore had acted within its rights and in accordance with international law.

"If you go on the basis of sensitivities, where do you begin and where do you end? What is the basis for deciding who can do what? We believe that we are doing what we are entitled to do. We do not seek a collision or confrontation," he said.

Malaysia had asked Singapore to be sensitive although the land reclamation was within the latter's territory, voicing fears that it would narrow the straits, thus affecting shipping flow as well as the ecology and livelihood of fishermen in the area.

During his visit, Lee told his Malaysian counterpart, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, that Singapore was prepared to consider Malaysia's views and had asked Kuala Lumpur to send a note on its concerns.

Another local newspaper, Today, reported that Lee said that both sides had less room to manoeuvre now because the land reclamation issue had been played up by the Malaysian media.

"We do not seek a confrontation and it is a pity it has been blown up in the Malaysian newspapers," he was quoted as saying.

If it had been discussed quietly, there would be more room for give and take, he added.

As a result, even if Singapore made adjustments, it would face questions from its own people why it was backing down, Lee said.

Apart from the land reclamation issue, the two countries still have to resolve an agreed package of outstanding issues that includes a new water supply agreement for Singapore and the redevelopment of Malaysian-owned railway land here.

Lee said during the visit that Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had sent a letter to Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew on a new formula for the water pricing and Singapore was studying the proposal.

-- BERNAMA

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