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Rumour of Singapore PM quitting makes the rounds

IT appears that speculation that Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong may announce his decision to step down in favour of his deputy Lee Hsien Loong has been making the rounds in the republic.

This was the subject of a report last Wednesday in The Straits Times which saw analyst Chua Lee Hoong saying that the rumour mill may have been working overtime due to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's announcement that he will retire next October.

And the grapevine had it that the perfect forum for such an announcement could be the National Day rally today.

Saying that this did not make sense, the writer added that one reason why Goh would not step down soon was that he would want to see bilateral ties remain on an even keel when Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi takes over from Dr Mahathir.

And what will Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong tell his audience at the state of the nation address today?

According to the The Straits Times, he may take the opportunity to report any alteration in the economic situation.

"And, certainly, many will hope that he gives some clarity to the picture," a report said, adding that in the last few months, Singaporeans had been inundated with confusing reports on the situation.

The Straits Times, meanwhile, engaged in a little bit of chest-thumping, albeit in an oblique manner, when it carried letters from readers congratulating it on winning the title of "Newspaper of the Year in the Pacific Rim".

Jeffrey Law Lee Beng, in his letter headlined "Straits Times scores on impartiality", said the newspaper had been impartial and balanced in its foreignnews coverage and analysis, especially in the region.

On the local front, he said it had been able to "connect with the local community and efforts in nationbuilding".

Law alleged that newspapers in neighbouring countries (read Malaysia) invariably carried negative reports on Singapore.

"Worse still, facts are distorted to paint an unfavourable view of our people and Government, so much so I begin to lose faith in them," he lamented, adding that there was no bias in the way The Straits Times covered stories without fear or favour.

In another development, a recent statement by former Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Musa Hitam that Malaysia borrowed several ideas from Singapore in the 1980s may be food for thought.

There may be something to Singapore's effort to encourage the average man in the street to learn the languages of his fellow citizens.

The Straits Times carried a report on Tuesday about a 50-year-old man of Chinese origin learning useful Tamil phrases.

According to the newspaper, learning the language of a person from another race is the best way to relate to that person and start a friendship.