

Cabinet moves on, holds Lee to his word on good ties

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PUTRAJAYA: The Cabinet yesterday drew a line under the spat with Singapore over Lee Kuan Yew's data that Chinese were being marginalised here.

But not before making two important points: One, that Lee's letter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi did not qualify as an apology. In fact, the ministers felt that the former Singapore prime minister had repackaged his jaundiced views about Chinese here being marginalised and compliant.

Two, since Lee said that he wanted good bilateral ties with Malaysia, the onus was on him to translate that into action.

In a letter to Abdullah, Lee said that he was sorry for the "great deal of discomfort" caused by his statement that the Chinese in Malaysia were being systematically marginalised:

He said that when he made those comments at a forum on

the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund/World Bank meeting last month, he had no intention of meddling in Malaysian politics.

The PM's reply on Tuesday was terse. He said: "I received the letter and I understand the contents of the letter... I have

taken note of it."

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Cabinet briefly discussed Lee's letter at its weekly meeting, and the ministers endorsed Abdullah's response.

"The position of the Cabinet is just what the PM has said, that the statement was un-called for, and we hope it won't be repeated for the sake of good neighbourly relations."

Syed Hamid said that the ministers felt that Lee's initial statement at the forum was an incitement and described his letter as nothing more than a repackaging of those comments.

"That's Lee's position. He even repeated it in his letter, yet he also said that he doesn't like to cause discomfort and that he wants good bilateral relations.

"So let's see him translate this into action," Syed Hamid said yesterday.

It did not matter whether Cabinet was rejecting or accepting the letter,

"We don't want to dwell on this. The facts are clear that those are his views, he knew very well what he was saying."

On whether the government would follow up on the letter with a reply: "I think only the newspapers are interested in that. Whatever Lee has said was intentional, and the damage is done."

Other ministers contacted yesterday also said they were unhappy with Lee's letter.

Home Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Radzi Sheikh Ahmad said the Cabinet supported Abdullah's response to Lee, and would take no further action.