

PM: Don't repeat it

Lees statement could have incited feelings of Malaysians

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PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he has "taken note" of Singapore Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's explanation over his disparaging remarks on Malaysian Chinese and wants an assurance that such statements will not be made again.

The Prime Minister felt that Lee's statement on the Chinese community here could have incited the feelings of Malaysians.

He said Lee's statement was uncalled for and not appreciated, and he did not agree with the remark that the Chinese community in

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Malaysia was being marginalised.

"I have taken note of Lee's letter and its contents and it is important that he has to give an assurance that such a statement should not be made again," Abdullah said after a closed-door meeting with ulamas at his office yesterday.

"I certainly reject the premise on which Lee had made the statement and I believe that such a statement does not contribute to good neighbourly relations.

"Whatever the reasons are, what he had said could have incited the people, and relations would not be that good."

Declining to comment further, the Prime Minister did not say whether he had accepted Lee's apology or whether he was satisfied with the reply given by the republic's former prime minister.

On Sept 15, the 83-year-old Lee told a forum that the attitude of Malaysia and Indonesia towards the republic was shaped by the way they treated their Chinese communities.

"My neighbours both have problems with their Chinese. They are successful, they are hard working and therefore, they are systematically marginalised," Lee had said.

The remarks drew protests from Malaysia and Indonesia, with both countries summoning Singapore's envoys to explain Lee's remarks.

Last week, the Malaysian Government told the Singapore High Commissioner here to explain the statement by Lee, while Abdullah said he had written a letter to Lee expressing his displeasure over the remarks.

Last Saturday, Lee's office issued a statement that the republic's founding father had already written to Abdullah on the issue and on Monday, the Prime Minister received the response letter.

Asked if he would reply to Lee's letter, Abdullah said: "No, I will not be sending a reply."

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Government did not consider Lee's letter of explanation as a letter of apology.

"It is not an apology, he was saying that he was sorry for causing discomfort, not that he was sorry for saying that. It is two different things.

"He just restated what he felt and it went beyond (what was) just a previous discussion," he said before breaking fast with Wisma Putra staff in Putrajaya yesterday.

Syed Hamid said Malaysians were proud of the country's multi-racial composition and the unity and harmony achieved over the years, and the Government did not want any party to disturb this.

Since Lee had ended his letter hoping to have good bilateral relations with Malaysia, Syed Hamid said, the incident

could be translated into form, substance, and action to build a future and not look back.

Barisan Nasional Youth chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said Lee had to issue an apology to the Malaysian Government and the people because he had clearly violated the country's dignity and sovereignty by his statement on how the Chinese in Malaysia were treated.

He added that Lee had to apologise after he faced criticism from Malaysians of all races, that he had overstepped the boundaries on an internal issue that should be discussed by Malaysians and not outsiders.

"It's not easy for Lee to issue an apology, and we take it with reservation

from someone who is very wise and experienced," Hishammuddin told reporters after chairing the Barisan

Youth national committee meeting here yesterday.

In Singapore, the media in the republic, besides reporting what Lee had said in the letter, also published the letter in full, including the annex which listed numerous media reports containing comments from Malaysian leaders about the marginalisation of Singapore Malays.

Bernama reported.

The annex mentioned over a dozen such reports, from the Malaysian media dated from August 1998 till as recent as

Sept 3 this year.