

Why Dr M is not going to meeting

16 SEP 1981

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he was not attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Melbourne late this month because "there is a lot more work to do here in Malaysia."

He said that looking back at the whole Commonwealth grouping and idea "there has been just too much talk at the meetings and very little results."

The Prime Minister was speaking to reporters just after arriving home from a two-week vacation in Spain and Portugal.

Indicating that Malaysia would attach less importance to its Commonwealth ties, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said, however, that the country was not "breaking away."

"We will see if something tangible comes out of it, and maybe reconsider our position," he said.

He hit out again at it, saying: "We are not getting much help, particularly from certain Commonwealth countries."

It was not clear, however, which countries he had in mind, although it is understood that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir was speaking in terms of economic co-operation within the grouping.

The CHOGM is scheduled for Sept. 30 and will last till Oct. 7. Foreign Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie is representing Malaysia at the meeting.

On his vacation, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, said: "It was very nice."

His lunch with his Portuguese counterpart had included general trade discussions.

Trade with Spain and Portugal was very much in Malaysia's favour, he said, and the two countries would like more of their goods to be marketed here.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said fruits, machinery, pharmaceutical products and ore were some of the goods which Malaysia could buy from Spain and Portugal.

"More Malaysians should also visit Spain," he quipped. "It's a beautiful country, with lots of historical sights."

He said that the Cabinet meeting would be on as usual tomorrow.

Bernama reports: The Government has lodged a strong protest with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Australian Government over reports by the Australian mass media, especially the ABC, which had tarnished the good name of the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The protest was made by the Malaysian High Commission in Canberra, a statement from the Foreign Ministry said today.

The statement followed a report in a local newspaper about the criticisms made of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir for not attending the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Australia later this month.

The statement said the Prime Minister could not attend the meeting because of pressing duties in the country.

"The reply had been conveyed to the Australian Government.

"We have been informed that the Australian Foreign Minister has issued a statement yesterday criticising the ABC. The Australian Government has expressed regret over the incident," the statement added.