

NOT GOOD ENOUGH

PM: We cannot accept Aussie explanation

By Wong Chun Wai

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Malaysia cannot accept Australia's explanation on the kind of press freedom practised there. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said he had conveyed this to Australian Foreign Minister Senator Gareth Evans during their meeting last Tuesday.

Dr Mahathir said press freedom did not mean that the press was free to undermine others.

"I explained (to Mr Evans) that we are aware of the press freedom practised over there,"

the Prime Minister said.

"But the press freedom in Australia had stretched beyond normal press freedom where all kinds of lies had been created," he told newsmen after chairing an Umno supreme council meeting.

Dr Mahathir said: "I do not think the (Australian) government need to defend this, that is our view. Whether he agrees or not, we do not care."

In this respect, he said, the Australian Government should not perpetuate such reasoning.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on Mr Evans' meeting with him in a move to mend the deteriorating diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Mr Evans, who was here to attend the Asean Post Ministerial Conference, had also handed to Dr Mahathir a letter containing Australia's wish to improve ties.

Dr Mahathir said today that Malaysia was of the view that freedom of the press did not include creating stories to smear others.

"I explained that in England, there are also newspapers that support the government and those which oppose," he said, adding that the existence of pro-government newspapers did not mean that there was no press freedom in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said many foreigners had claimed that press

freedom did not exist in Malaysia.

"Maybe they just read *The New Straits*, *Berita Harian* and *Utusan* Malaysia and not publications like the *Harakah*, *Watan* and *Rocket*," he added.

In an apparent reference to Australia's argument that the country had a robust press, Dr Mahathir said: "Freedom of the press is not good enough. The newspapers are free but newspapers lying deliberately this is not freedom."

In reply to another question, Dr Mahathir said there was no special message in his letter to President Suharto delivered by Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghafar Baba yesterday.