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AUSTRALIAN PM CALLS ON MAHATHIR

Mahathir-Hawke

from Kuah Guan, Oo *Dr. Oversea trips.*

HARARE, Oct 18 (Bernama) -- Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke Thursday called on Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad here, and the Malaysian prime minister said +I should think that the relations (that had been strained between the two countries) are back to normal ...+

+I should think that the relations are back to normal, barring some usual shyness on the part of the people who are reconciled,+ Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir told newsmen after the talks, for about an hour, in his hotel suite.

Both prime ministers are attending the Commonwealth Heads Of Government Meeting (CHOGM) here.

He said Encik Hawke had given him the undertaking that the Australian government would make a public statement, when the first occasion arose, disassociating itself from any Australian media lies about Malaysia.

Similarly, the Malaysian government would make a public statement, when the first occasion arose, if the Malaysian media had lied about Australia.

Asked how serious was the breach in relations, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said: +For us, it is just a means of registering our displeasure, but apparently the Australian government took it seriously. -- more

♥18/10/16-21MST

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Mahathir-Hawke 2 Harare

+I don't think it affected trade between the two countries but there may be some minor incidents,+ he added.

+But it is good that the Australian government becomes conscious of this displeasure because by not caring at all about the kind of lies being told by the Australian media about Malaysia, it would seem as though the Australian government approved of such lies,+ he said.

The prime minister said it was a whole series of events that led to the strained ties. The TV show +Embassy+, which was a veiled attempt to ridicule Malaysia, was the +last straw+ that led to the breakdown in diplomatic relations.

+Finally, we couldn't put up with it anymore, especially (when it was) coming from a friendly country,+ he said of the Australian media attacks on the Malaysian government.

Among the events, he cited the Australian TV series +Slow Boat To Surabaya+ as an attempt to depict the country in a very bad light. -- more

♥18/10/16-25MST

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Mahathir-Hawke 3 Harare

He also said that in 1987, three months after the government acted to stabilise the (political) situation in the country (through Operation Lallang), an Australian TV asked him how was everything in the country.

He said he answered that it was +fine+ and the TV showed him as saying that everything was fine next to the scene of three months ago (when a soldier ran amok in Chow Kit).

+The viewers will think that I am telling a lie. Why did they (the Australian media) do that? The media is free but is it free to tell lies?+ he asked.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he was not asking others to impose restrictions on their media.

+We don't impose restrictions on our press,+ he said, adding that he would like to invite the Australian media to read the vernacular press like the Chinese newspapers, Watan and Harakah. -- more.

♥18/10/16-26MST

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Mahathir-Hawke 4 (last) Harare

+If there is no press freedom, they would be put under detention. Some are libellous, some are provocative in instigating the people to disturb the peace. We have to put up with it.

+We are as liberal as Australia ... you may not believe it but we are,+ he said to a reporter from the Australian newspaper, The Age.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Encik Hawke had said that the same thing also happened to him but it would have been easier for the Australian government to openly disassociate itself from the media than just keep quiet about it.

Silence, he said, would make it appear that the government was supporting the media's lies, more so if it kept silent on the excuse of press freedom. -- Bernama

♥18/10/16-29MST