

Australia happy with PM's statement on extradition

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SYDNEY — The Australian Government, eager to avoid more bilateral disharmony with Malaysia, welcomed yesterday news that Kuala Lumpur will not block an attempt to extradite a Malaysian prince for abducting his children.

Given the delicate relationship between the countries, Friday's statement by Australian Attorney-General Michael Lavarch that he had launched extradition proceedings against Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah could easily have triggered a major diplomatic row.

Raja Kamarul is charged here under the Family Law Act with taking his two children, Iddin, 10, and Shahira, sev-

en, from Australia last July in contravention of a custody order and without the consent of their mother, Mrs Jacqueline Gillespie.

But Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad took the heat out of the issue on Saturday, saying Malaysia would not stand in the way of extradition orders provided they were legally processed.

"We have an extradition agreement with Australia and we must adhere to it, so long as the application is made through the appropriate legal channels," Dr Mahathir said.

However, there is some ambiguity about the status of extradition ar-

rangements between the two countries.

Australian officials said they did not believe there was a valid extradition agreement, and that Dr Mahathir must have been mistaken.

Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans is due to make a statement on the issue today, but officials in Canberra, though wary of raising false hopes for Gillespie, said they welcomed Dr Mahathir's statement.

Evans is under pressure here to raise with Indonesia the allegation that an Indonesian military official helped Kamarul defy Australian law by smuggling his children back to Malaysia via Irian Jaya. — AFP