

Dr M: Hard to understand the Aussies

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he cannot understand Australia's attitude in continuing to show its displeasure at his absence from the recent Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) summit.

The Prime Minister said Australia appeared to be angrier than host the United States over his decision to stay away from the Seattle summit.

"It is the Americans who invited me. If I refuse to go, that is their problem but Australia

seems angrier," he told newsmen at Parliament House yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the Australian media had used all kinds of derogatory terms against him.

"They have used all kinds of words to run me down, including calling me a *mamak*.

"Am I expected to run every time I am invited?" he asked.

This is the second time in a week that the two countries have traded barbs over the Apec summit.

On Saturday, Dr Mahathir made a similarly strong statement against Australia, including its media.

The furore started when Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating labelled Dr Mahathir "recalcitrant" over his absence from the summit.

Yesterday Dr Mahathir said "it was very difficult" to love the Australians despite attempts to be friendly to them.

He described the Australians as "ill-mannered," adding they did

not have the characteristics of Asians and their claims of being a part of Asia was meaningless.

Asked what Malaysia could do over Australia's reaction, Dr Mahathir replied: "We can't do anything ... people have no manners. With children, we can smack them. A whole nation or journalists, it is very difficult."

Dr Mahathir said what was imperative was whether Apec or the East Asia Economic Caucus was more beneficial to Malaysia.