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Australia-Reaction

AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS COMMUNITY TAKES OFFENSE TO KEATING'S REMARKS (C)

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov. 24 (Bernama) -- The Australian business community has reacted with hostility to remarks made by the Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating who called Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad "a recalcitrant".

Keating's offensive remarks were considered undiplomatic and reflected his ignorance of Asian values and attitudes, the Melbourne-based President of Australia-Malaysia Business Council V.T. Lingam said today.

He told Bernama in a telephone interview here that local newspapers and radio criticised Keating for his "stupid" statement about Dr Mahathir.

"We were shocked over Keating's remarks about Dr Mahathir for not attending the recent Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) summit in Seattle," he added.

He said the 200-member business council, made up of prominent Australian businesses, would meet the relevant Australian authorities to reconcile relations. -- more

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Lingam said Keating's remarks were his personal view and did not represent those of the Cabinet or Australians.

He was optimistic the Australian business community would continue to boost investment and trade between the two countries.

"We had discussions with the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA) today and four Australian big players, including AMCO and BHP have decided to invest over RM100 million in Malaysia next year," he said.

Lingam said Keating had not given any instruction to the business community to halt investments into Malaysia.

During past rows between the two countries, the Malaysian government had refused to consider tenders by Australian companies, he added.

Lingam said the Australian media viewed Dr Mahathir as wise and calm for his articulate response about Australian journalists.

Yesterday, the prime minister said they lacked manners and it was difficult for Malaysia to love Australia. -- Bernama

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