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Australia-protest '''

UMNO YOUTH SENDS PROTEST NOTE TO AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov. 24 (Bernama) -- Umno Youth today demanded an apology from the Australian Government over humiliating remarks levelled at Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad by Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating.

The movement sent a protest note to the Australian Government through its High Commission here, demanding the apology, expression of regret from Keating, an explanation for the remarks and an assurance that it would not recur.

Keating was reported to have said that Dr Mahathir was recalcitrant for not attending the informal meeting of heads of government of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Seattle last week. The Australian media also called Dr Mahathir all sorts of names.

Umno Youth Vice-head Datuk Nazri Abdul Aziz Yeop told a press conference here that the protest note, addressed to the Australian High Commissioner John Dauth, was hand delivered.

"We are giving the Australian Government a week to reply and if it fails to do so we'll ask the Malaysian Government to do three things in retaliation," he said. -- more

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These were downgrading the level of relations with Australia, implementing a "Buy Australian Last" policy and asking government departments to sever all links with Australia, he added.

In the protest note, Umno Youth said since Keating was elected by the people of Australia all his actions and words represented those of Australia.

By the same token, any humiliation of Dr Mahathir, who was elected by the people, was a humiliation of Malaysia, Nazri said.

"It's an ill-mannered statement from an uneducated person and it is something alien to us Asians," he added.

Nazri said Dr Mahathir responded in a mature way to Keating's statements and in a manner becoming of a leader who did not stoop to retorting to his remarks.

Nazri also said that in his capacity as Mara Chairman he had asked Mara to review its programme of sending its scholars to Australia. -- more

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"At present, 230 Mara scholars are preparing to further their studies in Australia and this will be reviewed and alternative places were being considered," he added

He expressed the hope that other departments would do likewise if the Australian Government did not meet Umno Youth's demands.

He said if Umno Youth had to resort to such action, the movement would urge Wisma Putra to send a diplomatic protest and would seek meetings with certain ministries with a view to cancelling trade contracts being negotiated with Australia.

Umno Youth would also lobby Cabinet Ministers to raise the matter at the Cabinet meeting, he added.

Meanwhile, the National MCA Information Bureau expressed regret over Keating's attitude. -- more

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It said in a statement that Malaysia, an independent and sovereign nation, need not necessarily abide by the wishes of Australia in any matter or policy.

The bureau expressed the hope that Australia, which aspired to be part of Asia, would display Asian values and respect the independence of other countries.

Keating should strive to strengthen the once strained relations between the two countries and not do the opposite, it said.

The Malaysian Youth Council (MYC) also expressed regret over Australia's attitude of deliberately playing up the issue of Dr Mahathir's absence at the Seattle summit.

MYC Deputy President Abdul Rahman Palil said in a statement that the council was proud of Dr Mahathir's effort to set up the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) and the effort had paid off with US President Bill Clinton's statement that he did not object to its formation. -- more

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Australia-protest 5 (last) Kuala Lumpur '''

President of the Smallholders Association of Malaysia Datuk Ahmad Arshad said Malaysia should firmly uphold its sovereignty so that it would not be belittled by other countries.

"Malaysia should demand an apology from the Australian Government over the extreme attitude of that country's Prime Minister as our patience also has its limits," he said in a statement.

In Kuantan, Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob described Keating's statements as most undiplomatic.

"Australia's interests are with Asia and it no longer depends so much on Europe and the United States like in the past both in economic and other aspects," he said. -- Bernama

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Australia-protest 6 (last) Kuala Lumpur (Reopens)

Meanwhile, the DAP Socialist Youth today criticised Australia for blowing up the issue of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad not attending the APEC summit.

"This is our country's business ... (Prime Minister) Paul Keating should not interfere in our country's affairs," the movement's head, Lim Guan Eng, said.

"It is most inappropriate for Keating to say such things about Dr Mahathir ... it is Dr Mahathir's right whether to attend or not," Lim said.

Chairman of the Kuala Lumpur Malay Chamber of Commerce Datuk Moehamad Izat Emir, in a statement, expressed regret over Keating's words against Dr Mahathir.

He believed Keating's statements did not reflect the views of the Australian people. -- Bernama

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