

CNS0226

U GE 25-11 00172 EA948

aae tbe

Keating-Press '''

KEATING UNDER FIRE FOR REMARKS ABOUT DR MAHATHIR

From K.C. Leong

MELBOURNE, Nov. 25 (Bernama) -- Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's remarks about Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's absence from the Seattle APEC leaders meeting have put him under heavy fire from the local press.

All the major newspapers -- the national dailies The Australian and the Australian Financial Review as well as the Sydney Morning Herald and the Melbourne Age -- have given the developments following Keating's remarks prominence over the last three days.

The Age headlined UMNO Youth's demand for an apology from Keating on its front page today.

In addition, the papers have commented editorially on the subject with generally negative conclusions about Keating's description of the Prime Minister as being "recalcitrant" for not attending the Seattle meeting.

The Australian said on Tuesday that Australia's success in Seattle had been marred by Keating's "counter-productive attack" on Dr Mahathir. -- more

KCL SJ LDB

▼25/11/16-25MST

U GE 25-11 00195 EA949

aae the

Keating-Press 2 Melbourne '''

In a separate commentary in the same issue of the paper, its Foreign Editor Greg Sheridan said Australia's efforts to cope effectively with its trade challenges were made hugely more difficult by Keating's "idiotically gratuitous" comments.

He said Malaysia could do a great deal to harm and frustrate Australia's (economic) integrationist agenda in Southeast Asia if it wanted to.

Keating's comments, he said, were "counter-productive and dumb".

He also said that the success of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Seattle last week should not blind Australia to the growing support for the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC).

For example, he said, there was a great deal of pro-EAEC feeling in Japan, especially in the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, while in Southeast Asia, "apart from Indonesia, there is very substantial pro-EAEC feeling".

The Sydney Morning Herald said in an editorial yesterday that Dr Mahathir's absence from Seattle was at least an honest statement of his position. "It was not something Keating should have become too fussed about." -- more

KCL SJ LDB

▼25/11/16-27MST

U GE 25-11 00175 EA950

aae the

Keating-press 3 (last) Melbourne

The paper also said that Keating's description of Dr Mahathir as recalcitrant was "not what should normally be said of the head of government of a friend, a neighbour and increasingly important trading partner".

"To suggest that Dr Mahathir was somehow obliged to turn up in Seattle -- and was therefore obstinate or uncooperative because he did not -- was "going too far," the paper said.

Referring to Keating's "intemperate" comment, the Age said in an editorial yesterday that calling Dr Mahathir recalcitrant and declaring that he "couldn't care less" whether Dr Mahathir attended the next Apec meeting or not was not the way business should be conducted with Australia's Southeast Asian neighbours.

Keating has also come under attack from Australian Opposition Foreign Affairs spokesman Andrew Peacock who called on the Australian leader to put aside his personal sensitivities towards Dr Mahathir and take steps to improve the strained relationship with Malaysia. -- Bernama

KCL SJ LDB

▼25/11/16-28MST