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Mahathir-Australia
NO MALAYSIAN OFFICIAL PROTEST AGAINST AUSTRALIA (P)

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 27 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will not lodge any official protest against Australia for uncalled for remarks by Prime Minister Paul Keating and some of the Australia media against Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir told reporters it was up to the Australian government and Keating himself to think of ways to rectify the situation they had created between the two countries.

"It's up to him (Keating) to decide. It's up to him to think about how to smooth things out again. I can't tell him," Dr Mahathir said when asked whether Keating should apologise to him to resolve the controversy between the two countries following the remarks.

He was speaking to reporters after witnessing the official signing of the Malaysian National Commercial Vehicle Project between Hyundai Motor Company of South Korea and Industri Otomotif Komersial (M) Sdn Bhd (INOKOM).

Earlier this week, Keating and some of the Australian media criticised Dr Mahathir for not attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Seattle.

Malaysians responded to the remarks by making several proposals, including calling on the government to sever diplomatic and trade relations with Australia. -- more

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Dr Mahathir said Malaysians who were unhappy with Keating's remarks had the right to make any proposal.

"There are people who feel unhappy about it. They made these proposals ... this is a free country. People in this country can talk freely," he said.

However, he also quoted reports in the local media and said there were also Malaysians who wanted the government to maintain its relationship with Australia.

When asked whether he, as the Malaysian prime minister, wanted to maintain the relationship between the two countries, he replied: "Of course I want to have good relations with everybody. It's other people who don't want to have good relations with me."

Asked if the government would sever its ties with Australia over the issue, as proposed by some quarters, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, we don't do things like that unless we have a very sound reason for doing that." -- more

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To a question on whether the issue could become serious if no action was taken to resolve it amicably, he said: "Whether it is serious or not depends on what follows."

"If people make up their mind not to blow it up and not to offend people, I think it will not be serious," he said.

However, he added that if people took this opportunity to pass nasty comments on others and tried to advise other people on how they should behave, things could become serious.

Dr Mahathir said some Australian newspapers, film companies and television stations seemed to be bent on souring up relations. -- more
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"They are not happy unless they have created a problem. Of course (when problems arise) there is a lot of news and that's all that they care for. They don't care about relations," he said.

Dr Mahathir said some of the Australian media had even portrayed him as a difficult person, a dictator, very unpopular with everybody and that in Malaysia there was racial tension about to burst out into violence.

"I don't know where they got this impression. You see all these people, Chinese, Indians and Malays, they are not going to fight each other ... are you?" he asked, pointing to local reporters who were at the press conference.

Dr Mahathir declined to answer a question on what would he say if he were to meet Keating now.

In describing the question as very hypothetical, Dr Mahathir said he was disappointed with Keating. -- Bernama

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