

Dr M: Up to smoothen

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By Jeffrey Ramayah

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has left it to Prime Minister Paul Keating to smoothen Malaysia-Australia relations ruffled recently by the Australian leader's remarks.

The Prime Minister said Keating's remarks over his (Dr Mahathir's) refusal to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation meeting in Seattle last week had upset many Malaysians.

Keating had described Dr Mahathir as a "recalcitrant" when responding to Australian journalists' queries about the Malaysian leader's absence at the informal meeting of Apec heads of government called by the United States.

Asked whether he was upset, Dr Mahathir said: "I'm disappointed".

Speaking to reporters after witnessing the official signing ceremony of the Malaysian National Commercial Vehicle project at the Bukit Kiara Equestrian and Country Resort, Dr Mahathir said:

"Public opinion polls expressed through the local media showed that Malaysians want to have good relations with Australia.

"Of course, we want to have good relations with Australia but some of the Australian newspapers and television networks carried special articles on me just because I did not attend the Apec summit.

"These articles claimed that I am a dictator and I am a difficult person.

"Some of the Australian media even said that there is racial tension in the country which is waiting to burst out into violence," he said.

Dr Mahathir said some newspapers in Australia were bent on souring relations between the two countries.

He said there would not be any official protest by the Government over Keating's remarks or the articles published in the Australian media.

RTM suspends Aussie TV and radio broadcasts: P4

On the call by certain quarters that the Government review its trade ties with Australia, Dr Mahathir said Malaysians were free to express their views.

On the call to review diplomatic ties with Australia, Dr Mahathir said the Malaysian Government was not that hasty.

Among the Malaysians who took umbrage at Keating's remarks about the Prime Minister was DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang who today described the action by the Australian Prime Minister as unwarranted.

He said Keating should apologise to the Malaysian Prime Minister so that bilateral relations between the two countries would not be further strained.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu described as most unfair and uncalled for Keating's humiliating remarks about the Prime Minister for not attending the recent Apec meeting in Seattle.

"The decision by Dr Mahathir not to attend the Apec meeting was made purely in the national interest, and nobody has the right to question the decision," he said in a statement.

He said it was wrong for the leader of a country to criticise the leader of another in a personal way for a stand taken on an international issue.

Dr Mahathir had the full support of all Malaysians for his stand not to attend the Seattle meeting, said Samy Vellu, who is also Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister.

He said the MIC joined other component parties of the Barisan Nasional in expressing full support for the strong stand taken by Dr Mahathir on the issue.

Keating to relations