

Keating only explains why he reacted

PM: Letter not

conciliatory

to the Press the way he did

1993 - DEC 1993

By Adlin M. Zabri
and Saiful
Azhar Abdullah

LANGKAWI, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's letter does not contain any apology over his remarks made in Seattle, United States, last month.

The Prime Minister said he was not expecting an apology, adding that the letter which was received yesterday evening was not conciliatory.

Dr Mahathir, interviewed by RTM here, said: "Well ... in the first place I didn't expect an apology. But I just cannot define this letter as conciliatory."

"The only thing (about the letter) is that he wanted to explain why he reacted to the questions by the (Australian) Press."

"Apparently, it is not just his irritation with the Press but he also took offence over my comments that the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) has become massive."

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the contents of the letter which Keating wrote to him.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir was asked by local and foreign reporters about Keating's letter to him explaining his (Keating's) remarks on Nov 22 at the Apec meeting in Seattle.

Keating had described Dr Mahathir as "recalcitrant" when responding to Australian journalists' questions about the Prime Minister's absence at the meeting.

Dr Mahathir said it appeared that his remarks about Apec had partly prompted Keating to respond the way he did although Keating said in his letter that he did not mean to offend him (Dr Mahathir).

However, Malaysians seemed to be offended by

Keating's remarks, Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said: "I cannot understand why Australia, or the leader of Australia, should react in this way to my absence at Apec or to my comments about Apec being massive."

"As a matter of fact, I have been more critical of America for trying to dominate Apec, for trying to make use of Apec. I didn't attend the Apec meeting although I was invited by the President of the United States, President (Bill) Clinton."

"If anybody should be offended, I think it should be the President of America."

"Yet the President of America did not express anything bordering on being offended (over my criticisms) or with my absence. In fact, he said he'd still like to see me."

"And no other country or member of Apec has made remarks which can be translated by Malaysians as offensive ... no one has ... the only person happens to be the Prime Minister of Australia."

"I'm a bit disappointed because the Australian Foreign Ministry had apparently denied that Malaysia had protested (over Keating's remarks)."

"The Malaysian papers had reported about the protest, and this was followed up by the High Commissioner in Australia ... and yet the Australian Foreign Office said Malaysia did not protest, did not take offence to the remarks. This is not true."

Asked whether he would reply to the letter, Dr Mahathir said: "I really do not know ... how do I reply to a letter like that, which is of course not to be published."

"And I cannot reveal the contents of the letter because this is apparently meant to be a secret ... I really do not know how to

reply."

The Prime Minister said he did not add or comment to the statements made by two of his Cabinet Ministers who had criticised Australia

over the remarks.

Dr Mahathir said the Australian Government appeared to have interpreted the silence to suggest that he agreed with his Minis-

ters. The Ministers' criticism of Australia appeared to offend the Australian Government, Dr Mahathir said.

"I'm trying to avoid to say

anything that will make the relationship even more murky ... that's why I kept quiet."

"I did not ask for an apology but I don't think I need to

have an explanation as why the Prime Minister (Australia) is offended."

PLEASE TURN TO
PAGE 2, COL 2

Canberra must do plenty of work to repair damage

□ FROM PAGE ONE

my remarks," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here yesterday, chaired a two-day work camp at Gunung Raya.

Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat had said that his Ministry was considering strong action against Australia as a follow-up to the freezing of broadcasting co-operation with that country.

Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu had directed departments, agencies and companies under the purview of the Ministry to review their business ties with Australia.

NSI - 4 DEC 1993
Meanwhile, in Kuala Lumpur, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the Government would not object to ministries, departments or agencies taking action which they considered appropriate against Australia over Keating's remarks.

Anwar said the Cabinet had discussed the matter on Wednesday and agreed that ministries, departments and agencies dealing with Australia were free to take appropriate action against that country.

Anwar was also asked to comment on Keating's letter. He was speaking to reporters when he moved into

his Deputy Prime Minister's office at the Prime Minister's Department here.

Sources said Australia needed to do plenty of work to repair whatever damage Keating's remarks had caused by way of bilateral relations. They said Australia could expect some rough weather when dealing with government departments though the extent of this may vary from agency to agency.

The sources said any mending of relations would have to be initiated by Australia. After all, it was Keating's remarks which needed explanation, the sources said.