

# PM: LETTER NOT CONCILIATORY

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## Dr M: Keating only explained why he acted that way

By PAUL GABRIEL

**LANGKAWI:** Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has described Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's letter to him as not an apology and not even "conciliatory."

He said the letter was a mere explanation from Keating on why he had reacted in that manner to the press in Seattle.

Dr Mahathir said he understood by the contents of the letter that Keating had tak-

en offence to his (Dr Mahathir's) comments on the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) and was not irritated with the press as he claimed earlier.

"I just cannot find this letter as conciliatory. The only thing is that it explains why Keating acted that way.

"Apparently, he took offence to my comment that Apec has become massive," he told newsmen after reading a copy of the two-page letter which was handed to him by his assistant press secretary Zakaria

Abdul Wahab at the Sheraton Langkawi Resort here last night.

Dr Mahathir, whom Keating had tagged a "recalcitrant," said although the Australian leader said he did not mean to offend, it seemed so "in the eyes of many Malaysians."

The Prime Minister said he did not need an explanation from Keating on why he was offended and added that he did not understand why the latter acted as such

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## PM: No other country made remarks

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when it was the Americans who should have been hurt by his absence from the summit and comments on Apec.

"Yet the (US) President did not express anything bordering on being offended or with my being absent. In fact, he said he still wanted to see me."

Dr Mahathir said it should also be noted that no other country or Apec member had made remarks that could be construed by Malaysians as offensive, apart from Keating.

He said he was also dis-

sappointed with the Australian Foreign Ministry for contending that Malaysians had not protested over Keating's remarks, although official protests had been lodged with the Australian High Commissioner.

On Australia's claim that he agreed with the offensive criticisms against Australia by two Malaysian Ministers by choosing to remain silent, he replied:

"I did not say anything because I am trying to avoid doing anything that would make the relationship even more murky. That's why I kept quiet."

To a question, Dr Mahathir said he would not reply to Keating's letter.

In KUALA LUMPUR, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said yesterday that Keating should apologise to Dr Mahathir.

Dr Ling, who is Transport Minister, said Keating had stopped short (of an apology) and this had made the issue more conspicuous.

"He should find an earliest and suitable occasion to take the little step," he said.

Dr Ling said it Keating should not be ashamed for Keating to say sorry or

admit his own mistake because "to err is human."

He noted that many people, had advised him (Keating) to apologise.

He said his ministry had not thought of taking any action on the matter because there was no dealing with Australia in the transport sector.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said the Cabinet would need to study the contents of Keating's letter before deciding on any further action regarding Malaysia-Australia relations.