

REGRET NOTED

Dr M prepared to accept Keating's statement

9 DEC 1993

LANGKAWI: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is prepared to accept Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's statement of regret but wants to verify it first.

The Prime Minister said yesterday that he had always accepted regrets but could not make a decision based on press reports or what Australian journalists told him.

"We get into a lot of trouble because somebody says somebody said something," he said in reply to comments and questions from Australian journalists at a packed press conference at the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre.

Dr Mahathir then asked an Australian reporter whether he (the reporter) wanted him to interpret Keating's statement of regret as an apology.

And when the reporter replied, "yes, please," Dr Mahathir smiled and nodded.

He stressed he had on many occasions made public apologies for "lesser things."

"Whatever happens now will have a bearing on any Cabinet decision on Saturday on the status of relations with Australia," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he had not been able to follow the developments via the media due to his busy schedule during Lima '93.

"That is only a report as related by you . . . I don't know what is the exact word."

To a question, Dr Mahathir said he would check with Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on the latest developments.

Asked whether he would have apologised under similar circumstances, he replied: "I have made

Good ties
with all
countries

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public apologies on many occasions for lesser things."

Abdullah had said on Tuesday that Saturday's Cabinet meeting would decide the status of relations with Australia, which deteriorated after Keating tagged Dr Mahathir a "recalcitrant" in Seattle.

Dr Mahathir said he did not wish to argue on the interpretation of the word "regret" and whether it meant an apology.

Asked whether the row would affect the country's foreign investments, he said Malaysia had always maintained good relations with other countries.

On the opposition's support for the Government on the controversy, the prime minister said this portrayed the general feelings of all Malaysians, adding that he felt that "their (the opposition's) reaction is genuine."

To another question, Dr Mahathir said the views expressed by ministers on the issue were made on their own and "without direction from me."

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