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Mahathir-journalists

BE MORE SENSITIVE, AUSTRALIAN JOURNALISTS TOLD

LANGKAWI, Dec 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today told Australian journalists to be more sensitive and urged them to tell the truth for the best interest of all parties.

"Number one is to speak the truth and when you cannot speak the truth, you tone down," he said in response to a question on Malaysia-Australia relations following the derogatory remarks made by Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating against Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister was earlier asked on the latest development concerning the row between the two countries and he said that he would make an announcement tomorrow after discussions with his colleagues.

The cabinet is scheduled to hold its weekly meeting tomorrow morning to be followed later by an Umno supreme council meeting.

Telling the Australian Press to be responsible, Dr Mahathir said: "You (once) went around telling people that we murdered Vietnamese (refugees) when in fact we were helping them.

"Do you think that is fair? We don't get angry for no reason ... you (Australian Press) show the pictures of us slashing and killing and celebrating the murder of Vietnamese (refugees). I saw those pictures ... it is grossly unfair," he told a press conference here. -- more

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"We never said anything about Australians misbehaving... even if they do, why should we annoy them. We think it is in the best interest of everyone to speak the truth," he said.

Responding to another question, Dr Mahathir made it clear that he had no quarrel with Australia's private sector and he had been telling the people that it was the Australian government which caused all the problems.

Saying he could get along fine with everybody, he said the reason why foreigners invested in Malaysia was because "we are very nice people."

Asked on a report that the Japanese Prime Minister had offered to mediate, Dr Mahathir said he would like to thank him for the offer but "I don't think we have reached that stage (that warranted mediation)."

Asked if he had received extracts of Keating's speech in which Keating was said to have regretted his remarks, Dr Mahathir said: "... I would have a discussion with my colleagues, and will make some announcements after that."

He refused to state the expected stand to be taken tomorrow when pressed further by the reporter, but said: "What I will do depends on what my colleagues tell me."

Keating sparked the crisis last month when he called Dr Mahathir a recalcitrant for not attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Seattle. -- Bernama

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