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Mahathir-Hayden

MALAYSIA-AUSTRALIA TIES NOT AFFECTED BY HAYDEN'S STATEMENT

KUALA LUMPUR, April 5 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today relations between Malaysia and Australia will not be affected by the remarks of former Australian Governor-General Bill Hayden who had made unfounded allegations against the Malaysian government.

The prime minister said: "This is a statement by a frustrated politician."

"I will not allow such frustrated people to sour our ties with the new Australian government solely because this government is not from Bill Hayden's party," he said after launching the "Gift of Tree" Project, here.

Bill Hayden, who was former foreign minister from 1983 to 1987 and retired as Governor-General last February, recently accused Malaysia and several other Asian countries of being racists.

He said in a radio programme in Sydney that Dr Mahathir discriminated against the Chinese community and that the Indians in Malaysia were dirt poor.

Malaysia-Australia relations had improved recently following a meeting between Dr Mahathir and his Australian counterpart, John Howard, in Brisbane where Dr Mahathir stopped over after his official visit to New Zealand.

On the Malay traders' concern over high rentals for business premises that had rendered them unable to compete in areas monopolised by the non-Malays or in the new towns, Dr Mahathir said the government had taken steps to reduce the rentals but the reduction could not be too big.

"We have given them a chance to reduce a bit but it is not possible to reduce a lot. The problem is that when we are able to afford to a certain level, we want better and better premises and that is not always possible," he said.

A recent newspaper survey on Malay traders in the areas concerned found that they were not able to afford rentals above RM1,000 a month.

Dr Mahathir said: "When we want to do a RM1,000 business with RM1,000 capital, there is no problem. But when we want to do RM10,000 business with RM1,000 capital or RM100,000 business when we get RM10,000, there will always not be enough.

Asked whether high rental rates could affect the competitiveness of the Malays with the other races he said: "It is not right if they pay low rentals but if they pay the same rentals it is alright." -- Bernama

NJ JK