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Australia-Hayden

AUSSIE GOVERNMENT DISTANCES ITSELF FROM RACIST SLUR

KUALA LUMPUR, April 5 (Bernama) -- The Australian government has distanced itself from remarks by former Governor-General Bill Hayden that some Asian countries including Malaysia are racists.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said Wednesday over an Australian radio programme that his government did not share Hayden's views and the latter had spoken as a private citizen.

Downer was questioned on Hayden's accusations on a peak-time current affairs radio programme by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

According to a transcript released by the Australian High Commission here today, Downer was asked if he agreed with Hayden that Australia's Asian neighbours were racially intolerant.

Downer replied: "I don't agree with that and that isn't the view of the Australian government and Mr Hayden makes those remarks as a private citizen. They weren't remarks that he made in his capacity as governor general or in the offices he held before that and that is not the view of the Australian Government."

Hayden, who was foreign minister from 1983 to 1987 and stepped down as governor general in February, made the accusations the same day on a Sydney radio station.

He had criticised Malaysia's New Economic Policy which was designed to restructure the distribution of wealth among the various races of the country.

His remarks drew a storm of protests from local politicians and leaders of various ethnicity. They said Hayden was donning a superiority complex in making the unwarranted remarks.

MIC president Datuk Seri S Samy Vellu, taking umbrage at Hayden's comment that Indians in Malaysia were "largely dirt poor", said Hayden was ill-informed and unaware of what was happening here.

Ties between Malaysia and Australia, soured largely by a biased Australia media, is improving and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad met his counterpart, John Howard, while on transit in Brisbane on his way home from an official visit to New Zealand last week. -- Bernama

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