

16 JAN 1996

Keating-Mahathir

KEATING'S VISIT IMPROVES UNDERSTANDING, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the official visit by his Australian counterpart Paul Keating is important to help overcome minor misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of each other.

Dr Mahathir said their one-hour discussion was "as harmonious as it can be".

Replying to a question from the Australian press on how he rated the importance of their hand shakes, Dr Mahathir said: "I have never worked out how you measure hand shakes."

Asked further whether Keating actually came here to meet and shake hands with him, he said: "Sure."

"I shake hands with a lot of people and about 10,000 people during festive occasions. I shake hands with everybody and Keating as the leader of Australia," he said after Keating called on him at his office at the Prime Minister's Department here.

Keating arrived here yesterday for a three-day official visit.

Dr Mahathir said the understanding that he expected from Australia was acknowledging the restriction that Malaysia was a multi-racial country and has its own sensitivity.

"Before people pass on their opinion at least they should understand the situation we are facing.

"Off and on, we as politicians sometimes burst out say something which we regret later," he said.

Dr Mahathir said each country had different values and Malaysia did not think that it had the right to tell other people how to run their country.

On the future role of Australia in Asia, Dr Mahathir said Australia had a role to play and its future form had to be worked out by both Australia and Asian countries.

Earlier, the two prime ministers witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on education between the two countries.

Education Ministry Secretary-General Dr Johari Mat signed on behalf of Malaysia while Australian High Commissioner John Dauth signed for his country.

The MoU is to promote the exchange of scholars, twinning programmes for universities, scholarship and places for Malaysian students in Australian higher institutions of learning. -- BERNAMA