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Mahathir-Keating

MAHATHIR CAN'T GET AWAY FROM KEATING

By: K.C. Leong

BANGKOK, March 3 (Bernama) -- It seems as if Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad just can't get away from Paul Keating even though the latter is poised to leave the national stage and possibly the international arena as well following his defeat in yesterday's Australian general election.

The Prime Minister was asked at a news conference yesterday whether he would be sorry if Keating lost (as he actually did) and today he was asked more directly whether he was happy that Liberal-National Coalition leader John Howard had won to become Prime Minister-elect.

+Whether or not I am happy that Keating has lost, to me both Paul and Howard are Australians (laughter). Australians are frank people. They are very frank particularrly about other people (more laughter).

+And I have been described as a recalcitrant by Paul but he visited me recently and we got on like a house on fire (laughter again). Whether it is because of his visit that he lost I don't know. (laughter again).+

Dr Mahathir said he would be happy with any Australian government provided they were friendly to Malaysia +and will not call me a recalcitrant+.

Those remarks by the Prime Minister were among some gems which kept a highly responsive audience fully entertained and absorbed at a regional business leaders forum here where he delivered a keynote address and later entertained questions from the floor.

His typical hard-hitting comments on what he thinks of western values, western definitions of equality and justice as well as his sharp repartees struck a responsive cord among the audience, most of them Asian.

As one participant from Hong Kong put it, +many of your words echo in many of us, at least those of us in Asia.+

Some other quotable quotes from the occasion include the following:

+First, you must overcome the feeling that you are not equal,+ he said when asked what role Japan should play in ASEM. +If we are criticised, we should not hold back by being polite but should reply that others are wrong too.+

+Somebody is controlling the press. It may be the editor, it may be the owner and it may be the advertiser but somebody is controlling the press and so I feel that I am dealing with a controlled press. As much as others may feel that in Malaysia, they are facing a controlled press.

+I deny that but there is no way I can make my voice heard. They are not going to publish it in any case.+

Asked what was the secret for his vitality at his age, Dr Mahathir said: +I have always maintained that you must pick your parents carefully.+

He said when his father passed away at the age of 82, his hair was still black.

+If you retire too early, you will just fade away.+

+The border wall is not a Berlin wall. It is a friendly wall,+ he said when asked about the wall put up along the border in northern peninsular Malaysia which has stirred some controversy in Thailand.+

+When I was interviewed by the BBC on Asian values, immediately after interviewing me, they went to see a woman who has been bashed by her husband. The woman said, "Who cares about Asian values. My husband bashed

me and he said it is his right to do so." The Prime Minister said this was an example of skewed, distorted reporting.

He said the Internet had resulted in a diarrhoea of information and the people must master the techniques of managing information to sift the chaff from the wheat. -- Bernama

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