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Hanson

PAULINE HANSON HITS BACK AT DR MAHATHIR

By: Neville D'Cruz

MELBOURNE, Dec 1 (Bernama) -- Independent MP Pauline Hanson tonight took issue with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad over the race debate saying that the Malaysian Prime Minister was "talking through his hat".

Hanson, who Dr Mahathir said in Jakarta on Saturday was "a little bit moronic" told Channel 7 Network news in Brisbane: "Until Mahathir cleans up his own backyard and starts treating Chinese and Indian Malaysians as first class citizens, then and only then will I have some respect for what he has to say."

When asked after an informal meeting of Asean leaders in Jakarta if the group would take any action over the Australian race debate, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't want to get involved in such statements by someone who is a little bit moronic.

"We think it was started by a person of no consequence who has probably never seen other people behave nicely towards her so she makes these nasty comments."

In her maiden speech in Parliament about two months ago, Hanson who represents the electorate of Oxley just outside Brisbane, called for a review of immigration programmes and claimed Australia was at risk of being swamped by Asians, sparking a national and international debate about racial tolerance.

Meanwhile, Federal Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said on Channel Ten Network's Meet the Press programme that Australian racism could damage efforts to entice business migrants and fee-paying students to Australia.

"I accept that at face value, the sort of debate we've had can be counterproductive," he said.

"But there is no hard evidence at this stage that would suggest that what has occurred has had a significant impact in the numbers of people seeking to access Australia," he said.

On the Channel Nine Network's Business Sunday programme, one of Australia's leading businessmen, News Ltd Australian chairman Ken Cowley said Prime Minister John Howard should have spoken out more strongly to stop the debate.

Opposition leader Kim Beazley said Howard was playing footsie with the issue. -- BERNAMA

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