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We don't welcome Howard the bully, says PM

SYDNEY, Wed: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launched a blistering assault today on Australia, saying his counterpart John Howard is a "bully" who is not welcome in Asia.

The Prime Minister, in a verbal attack which sparked angry rebuke from Howard, said Australia should behave like the small nation it is instead of trying to teach Asia how to go about its business.

He labelled Australian laws "unfair" to Aborigines and accused Howard of favouring deposed and jailed former Malaysian deputy prime minister Datuk seri knwar Ibrahim.

"If Australia wants to be a friend of Asia it should stop behaving as if it is there to teach us how to run our country," he told an interview with SBS television to be broadcast tonight.

"It's a small nation in terms of numbers and it should behave like a small nation and not be a teacher."

Asked whether he thought Howard was welcome in Asia, Mahathir said: "No. I don't think so, not in Malaysia anyway."

"He thinks we are undemocratic, we are unjust. He thinks his favourite politician in Malaysia (Anwar) should not face the law, that any finding that is not in his favour would be regarded as an injustice. Obviously, he has preconceived ideas."

In the interview, Mahathir accused Canberra of seeking to "bully" its regional neighbours in regard to its policy on Indonesia.

"You know, you have a policy that was formulated by Keating, then you change your policy because you now feel that now Indonesia is weak you can impose your will," he said.

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"If you have a policy, you should stick to that policy and not change it simply because you think you can bully others."

He advised the Australian premier to sort out his own problems at home before lecturing Asia.

"You have a prime minister who doesn't even recognise that you have a problem about this stealing one generation of Aborigines," he said.

"Your law as applied has

been very unfair to the Aboriginal people, so I think it is better for you to look at home, where you have a lot of racial problems, and solve that before trying to solve other people's problems."

Howard said it was clearly untrue to say he was not welcome in Asia.

It was apparent Australia was deeply involved with the region and he played down any impact on trade links.

Howard describes his relationship with Mahathir, as "cordial". - AFP