

25 NOV 2002
Australia-Mahathir
Dr M CRITICIZED FOR COMMENTS ON AUSTRALIA

MELBOURNE, Nov 25 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad should take a running jump over comments Australia has to decide whether it is Asian or Western, said the Opposition Labour Party.

The Opposition foreign affairs spokesman, Kevin Rudd, told Channel's News this morning that Dr Mahathir was simply wrong and Australia would not "sit back and cop it sweet".

Dr Mahathir has said that Australia has gone too far in identifying with the United States' aims and tactics in the war against terrorism.

"Australia has to decide whether it's an Asian country or a Western country," Dr Mahathir told 'The Australian' newspaper, adding that Australia would always be regarded as an outsider in its own region.

Rudd, a former diplomat, said that the climate of terrorism and the recent Bali bomb blasts had changed the way the government advises its citizens. "I think frankly it's time the Prime Minister of Malaysia took a running jump," he said.

"The bottom line is we have had nearly 100 Australians murdered in Bali in a terrorist attack.

"Now, that has radically affected the way in which we are going about advising Australians about the safety of travelling in the region."

Rudd admitted that better relations may enhance security between nations.

But he argued: "That doesn't mean you've just got to sit back and cop it sweet when the Prime Minister of Malaysia says something which I think is just plain wrong and his statement as reported over the weekend is just plain wrong."

Meanwhile, Federal Tourism Minister Joe Hockey said that as a member of the government, he had to be more diplomatic.

But he added: "I understand where Kevin's coming from."

-- BERNAMA

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