

# Howard's criticisms don't bother Malaysia, says DPM

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KUALA TERENGGANU: Malaysia is not bothered by Australian Prime Minister John Howard's criticisms against the country as he is not able to understand Malaysia's role and aspirations in the Asian region, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

The Deputy Prime Minister said Howard's latest remarks about Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and himself during the Apec meeting should be considered "unimportant views."

"He has a choice of saying anything he wants and to Malaysia, it's just his choice of making a statement which has

no bearing on Malaysia's policy of being friendly and adopting respect for other nations in the region.

"He has been very critical of Dr Mahathir lately and to us, it's just Howard's views," he said after a luncheon with state religious leaders here yesterday.

Abdullah was commenting on Howard's statement in Bangkok that he would not do anything to mend the sour ties between both countries owing to Dr Mahathir's speech on Jew proxies and Australia being the US' sheriff in the region.

Howard had said he was sure that even when Abdullah takes over the premiership, the

relationship would remain the same.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said Howard could not fathom Malaysia's role as the champion of the Third World countries.

"As an independent country, we abhor any interference from any country or any threats made by any country to undermine Malaysia.

"We will stand by the policy that we will do good to others and we sometimes have a misunderstanding with certain countries but we have always used the diplomatic channel to solve the misunderstanding," he said.