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Leader-Mahathir

MAHATHIR FIRST ASIAN LEADER TO STAND UP TO THE WEST

MELBOURNE, Oct 30 (Bernama) -- A Malaysian-born Australian academic says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is the first Asian leader to stand up and hit back at Western leaders who had a superiority complex.

Adjunct Professor Vin D'Cruz, of the Asian Studies Centre at Melbourne's Monash University, told "The Australian" newspaper's Southeast Asia correspondent, Kimina Lyall: "There were problems in the (Malaysia-Australia) relationship before him (Dr Mahathir), but it didn't have any punch to it. The punch has come since 1981."

Prof D'Cruz said Dr Mahathir's basic criticism - that Australia had adopted the superior attitude of a colonial power looking down on its brown neighbours - had merit.

Dr Mahathir also believed Australia's relationship with Asia centred on Australia's troubled relationship with its own past.

"The things you hear about Mahathir - he is arrogant, abrasive - that's the language Europeans use to speak about Australians," Prof D'Cruz said, adding that Australia historically dealt with its inferiority complex about Britain by looking down on Asia.

"And then Mahathir came and didn't stick to the model of a dignified Asian leader...he stood up and hit back and we (Australians) thought, 'My God, the man thinks he's superior to us'. No other Asian leader has come out and demanded to stand on an equal footing with Australia."

Another Australian academic, Alison Broinowski, told the newspaper that Dr Mahathir's comments - especially those criticising Australia's treatment of Aborigines and migrants - "wouldn't play if they weren't partly true."

Broinowski, author of "About Face: Asian accounts of Australia", said Australia-Malaysia relations had been marred by an "agenda of insult" for

decades.

"Nobody can tell you who delivered the first insult, but everyone knows about it," she said.

Dr Mahathir, in particular, mastered the art of "endless revenge" and had spent much of the past decade revelling in opportunities to get back at perceived and real Australian injustices from decades before.

The newspaper said over the 22 years Dr Mahathir had been at Malaysia's helm, all four of Australia's Prime Ministers (Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke, Paul Keating and John Howard) had attempted to repair the relationship, only to become embroiled in his passionate tirades against perceived Australian arrogance in the region.

It said Howard had a rare opportunity for repair soon after his election in 1996, greeting Dr Mahathir on his overnight stop in Brisbane on the way to New Zealand, in a meeting that was billed as a sign Howard could forge friendships with Asia where Keating had failed.

"Within months, those hopes were in tatters as Mahathir milked Pauline Hanson's race debate for all it was worth," the newspaper said.

-- BERNAMA

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