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Howard 'unfazed' by sex cartoon

Australia's prime minister has played down an Indonesian newspaper cartoon portraying himself and his foreign minister as fornicating wild dogs.

The cartoon in Monday's Rakyat Merdeka paper reflected anger at Australia's decision to grant visas to 42 Papuans.

Prime Minister John Howard admitted the visas had strained ties with Indonesia, but said he was unfazed by the drawing.

Papua was integrated into Indonesia in 1969, but a small separatist group has battled for independence ever since.

Indonesian authorities are frequently accused of human rights abuses in the province.

The cartoon depicted a shaking Mr Howard mounting Mr Downer with the prime minister saying: "I want Papua!! Alex! Try to make it happen."

Mr Howard said it was obvious Indonesia had been angered by Australia's decision to grant three-year protection visas to the Papuan group - some of whom are reported to be leading pro-independence activists.

He reiterated Australia's full support for Indonesia's sovereignty over the province of Papua.

He told a news conference in Canberra he had taken no personal offence from the lurid cartoon and said he was confident there would be no permanent damage to bilateral relations.

"I've been in this game a long time. If I got offended by cartoons - golly heavens above, give us a break," he said, adding that he planned to visit Indonesia soon.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said the cartoon "fell way below standards of public taste" but the democratic press had the right to publish what it wanted.

The foreign minister called the Rakyat Merdeka newspaper "a tacky publication" and said many Australians would regard the cartoon as "very offensive".

Indonesia recalled its ambassador to Australia last week in protest at the visa decision. Indonesia's Vice President Jusuf Kalla, on a visit to Malaysia, said on Thursday the envoy would not return until Australia explained the refugee decision.

"If there is no proper answer, of course the relations [would deteriorate] like this," Mr Kalla said.



Mr Howard said he supports Indonesia's sovereignty over Papua

“ It's a pretty tacky sort of a publication and of course in tacky publications you get these sorts of things ”

Australian FM Alexander Downer

