

Protest against Howard's remarks

KUALA LUMPUR: Wisma Putra yesterday summoned Australian High Commissioner Robert Cotton to protest against remarks made by Prime Minister John Howard over the detention of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

In a statement it said Foreign Ministry Deputy Secretary-General I Datuk Ghazzali Sheikh Abdul Khalid called in Cotton to protest against not only Howard's statement but also other Australian leaders regarding events in Malaysia.

Ghazzali also handed over an

aide-memoire containing the protest to Cotton.

Wisma Putra said the *aide-memoire* categorically rejected the statements by the Australian leaders as baseless and reflected a wrong interpretation and understanding of the legal and political system.

On Monday, Howard said he was deeply concerned about Anwar's arrest and the the apparent "drift towards a more authoritarian approach" in Malaysia.

"The image of one's political opponents being arrested is

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very disturbing. And I can only hope that those forces inside the Malaysian Government that are pushing for an even more authoritarian government pull back," he said.

Howard yesterday reiterated his statement that Malaysia was moving "towards an authoritarian approach," claiming his comment was correct and objective.

Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer said the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) summit in Kuala Lumpur in November might have to be

7
moved because of the crisis.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Howard was the one who was authoritarian and dictatorial.

He said a person would be authoritarian when he made accusations before finding out the facts.

He also said that one should listen to both sides before making an opinion.

"When you just read the newspapers and make an opinion, I think that is very dictatorial," he said.