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Australia-Anwar

KENNETT REFUSES TO BACK HOWARD OVER MAHATHIR

By: Neville D'Cruz

MELBOURNE, Sept 24 (Bernama) -- The Premier of Victoria Jeffrey Kennett today refused to endorse Australian Prime Minister John Howard's comments on the arrest of former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, which led to an official complaint from the Malaysian Government.

Kennett said he would not comment on Howard's statement that Malaysia was moving to a more "authoritarian approach" following Anwar's arrest but indicated he held a different view.

The Victoria premier had a half-hour meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the start of the recent 16th Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur.

Mahathir said yesterday that Howard was "wrong, absolutely" and should "check the real facts" before making accusations.

"I'm not going to enter into that," Kennett, who did his National Service in Malaysia in the 1960s, told reporters.

Kennett said that neither Howard nor Opposition leader Kim Beazley had commented on US President Bill Clinton's difficulties.

"We're leaving that to the President and the Americans to work it out, as is correct," he said.

His comments today come just a week after he slammed "The Age" newspaper for "intolerance and lack of understanding" after it criticised Mahathir in an editorial saying Australians should not judge Malaysia too harshly.

"Malaysia is trying to adjust and I don't think we should be too harsh on them for the measures they have taken," Kennett said.

It was dangerous to judge other countries by Australian standards and Australia should not dictate to its neighbours if it valued its trade and diplomatic relationships, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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