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Anwar-Australia

AUSSIE NEWSPAPERS CRITICAL OF MALAYSIA

By: Neville d'Cruz

MELBOURNE, April 15 (Bernama) -- Australian newspapers and television and radio current affairs programme have been critical of the Malaysian government's handling of the Anwar Ibrahim case.

They questioned the independence of the Malaysian justice system and said that Malaysian international standing would suffer for some years to come after the High Court handed down a six-year sentence against Anwar on corruption charges.

"The Australia", the country's most prestigious newspaper, said in an editorial, the charges and trial had tarnished many aspects of Malaysian public life.

"The country's judicial system was once a paragon of transparency and justice but its credibility has been impaired by the Anwar trial," the daily said.

It said Anwar's defence team had little opportunity to pursue their line of questioning.

However, the editorial said: "There is no suggestion that Malaysia's Prime Minister attempted to exert direct influence on the trial judge. In a climate where the wishes of the political elite are obvious, such overt influence would hardly be necessary."

The Sydney Morning Herald said the justice system in Malaysia appeared to be "like the continuation of politics by other means".

"The fact that this trial was conducted by Judge Paul alone, however is no reason for confidence in its fairness. On the contrary, he (Paul) allowed the most salacious material to be aired against Mr Anwar, but refused to allow Mr Anwar's counter allegations of political conspiracy to run."

The newspaper also said Anwar's appeal seemed unlikely to succeed.

"In this essentially political struggle, Dr Mahathir is still on top. But the cost to Malaysia's economic, political and judicial institutions is yet to be counted," the Herald said.

The Australian newspaper's foreign editor Greg Sheridan said it would be a mistake to write Anwar off in Malaysian politics. "In time, he will be almost certainly be back, but that time is probably after Mahathir Mohamad has left the prime ministership".

Sheridan said Malaysian politics was "full of comeback takes", listing the come backs of Anwar (in 1970s), Mahathir's and Tengku Razaleigh after previous expulsions from Umno.

"Dr Mahathir thought he could manage Anwar's undeclared challenge without moving him out of the deputy prime minister's position," Sheridan said.

"He later thought he could discredit him with a criminal trial, which its Keystone Cops incompetence has ended up embarrassing Dr Mahathir and his government.

"But men are damaged. Neither is finished."

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