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Timor-Keating

KEATING HITS HOWARD ON EAST TIMOR

By: Neville D'Cruz

MELBOURNE, Oct 3 (Bernama) -- Former Australian prime minister Paul Keating today condemned his successor John Howard's intervention in strife-torn East Timor, saying it was nothing more than rank domestic opportunism.

Speaking at a Labour Party conference here, Keating said Howard was falsely claiming himself to be the champion of human rights when his involvement in East Timor was in fact misfired political manoeuvring to win public support.

"Howard claims to be battling in the name of principle not interest, but his policy has its genesis in the lowest interests of all, rank domestic opportunism," Keating said.

"In three years Howard has our nearest neighbours at our throats and yet he promised to make us relaxed and comfortable," said Keating.

Australia is leading the 7,500-strong United Nations-initiated Interfet (international force in East Timor) to bring order to the troubled territory whose population voted overwhelmingly for independence from Indonesia in last Aug 30 referendum.

Following that pro-Indonesia militias went on a murder spree and ransacked towns and villages.

At the UN in New York earlier this week, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad criticised Australia's high-handedness in East Timor and suggested that Asean take over the peace-keeping operations there from Australia.

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