

21 JUN 1999

Newspapers-Mahathir

MAJOR AUSSIE NEWSPAPERS GIVE PROMINENCE TO DR MAHATHIR

By: Neville D'Cruz

MELBOURNE, June 21 (Bernama) -- All major newspapers in Australia today gave prominence in its ``world news'' pages to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's undisputed success at the Umno General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The reports highlighted Dr Mahathir's account of the fallout with his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and the reasons why he acted decisively against his ambitious rival.

Under the heading "Anwar under attack by PM", the popular "Herald Sun" newspaper's report said Dr Mahathir attacked Anwar "in a bid to erase any residual support for the sacked deputy prime minister may have" in Umno.

The daily said Dr Mahathir and other Umno leaders had admitted that some party members remained sympathetic to Anwar and refused to accept his sacking and arrest.

The prestigious "Australian" national daily said, under the heading "Mahathir twists knife in Anwar", that the Prime Minister and Anwar spent the weekend "in a battle for the hearts and minds of the Malaysian people".

"Dr Mahathir had the larger audience, reaching the public through television broadcasts of his address" while "only a few (Malaysian) newspapers carried a denial by Anwar of Dr Mahathir's accusation ... that the former deputy PM had been disloyal to Umno," the report said.

"The Australian" quoted a senior Umno official as saying it was not proving easy to "exorcise the ghost of Anwar".

The Melbourne-based The Age's story said that Dr Mahathir had launched "a strategy to unite his fragmented party in the lead-up to the country's general election".

The newspaper said Dr Mahathir attacked Anwar's character and patriotism, portraying him as a puppet of foreign interests.

The "Australian Financial Review" featured a colourful picture of a beaming Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail wearing a blue and gold silk outfit at the launch of the opposition National Justice Party yesterday.

Under the heading "Mahathir fires first salvo as election nears", the Financial Review's report said while the Prime Minister kept everyone at the weekend guessing about the election date, "politicians and analysts expect it to happen within months as the economy recovers from recession, and before the Opposition can fully unite".

-- BERNAMA

NDC TS