

17 JAN 2000

AUSSIE NEWSPAPERS HIT OUT AT MALAYSIAN ARRESTS

MELBOURNE, Jan 17 (Bernama) -- Australia's two national newspapers today criticised the arrests of Malaysian opposition politicians and newspaper executives, saying it showed that Malaysia was a backward-looking state and would discourage overseas investment.

"The Australian" newspaper accused the government of resorting to intimidatory tactics to silence critics.

The Rupert Murdoch-owned newspaper said there was a "healthy body" of opinion in Malaysia that recognised that the arrests threatened universal principles of human rights.

"The Australian Financial Review" editorial said that having become Asia's elder statesman "and with some considerable achievements behind him, (Prime Minister Datuk Seri) Dr Mahathir appears intent on destroying his record before he leaves the political stage".

Parti Keadilan vice-president Marina Yusoff and DAP's Karpal Singh were separately charged with sedition last week while Keadilan's Youth chief Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor was charged under the Official Secrets Act (OSA) with possession of classified documents.

Zulkifli Sulong, editor of Harakah, and Chea Lim Thye, its printer, were also charged with sedition.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is also Home Affairs Minister, yesterday slammed the United States for criticising the arrests, saying that it was interfering in Malaysia's internal affairs.

-- BERNAMA

ndc sj JK