

# 12 FREED

STAR 1 MAR 2002

## Yemen clears students of any wrongdoing

By JANE RITIKOS and SA'ODAH ELIAS

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The 12 Malaysian students held in Yemen since last week have been freed. They are now at the Malaysian Embassy in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a.

Yemeni security forces have also cleared them of any involvement in political activities or wrongdoing.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday the government was disturbed with the trend of Malaysians going for studies overseas in unrecognised religious institutions.

He said some of these institutions were not even recognised by the government of that country.

"The level of education and facilities provided by some of these institutions are not even on the same level with our secondary schools, yet when our students come back from these institutions, they are regarded as ulama when the truth is their religious knowledge is questionable.

"To overcome the problem, the government planned to make it compulsory for students to register with the Malaysian embassies in the countries where they are currently studying and to state the name of the institutions they are enrolled with," he told reporters upon arrival at the KL International Airport from

a month-long leave overseas. (See Page 2)

The Star reported yesterday that the students of the Ma'ahad Tahfiz Al-Quran institute in Taiz were arrested last week.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the students were fine and were not mistreated during their detention.

He said the detentions were part of a crackdown on religious schools or *madrasahs* suspected of political activities and which were not registered with the Yemen government.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi thanked Wisma Putra and Syed Hamid for their efforts in getting the students released.

In Setiu, Terengganu, **MUSTAFA KAMAL BASRI** reports that the Education Ministry does not send its scholars to Yemen or Sudan but only to Jordan and Egypt.

Director General of Education Datuk Abdul Rafis Mahat said the students could have gone to Yemen on their own.

Yemen, wedged between Oman and Saudi Arabia, was torn between two governments for over two decades before the Marxist south and the Muslim north formally unified in 1990.