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Australia-Mahathir
DR M BARKS UP WRONG TREE, SAYS EDITORIAL

MELBOURNE, Nov 26 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's claim that Australia is too close to the United States is a furphy, according to "The Australian" newspaper editorial today.

Under the heading "Mahathir barks up wrong tree, again", the Rupert Murdoch-owned national daily said Dr Mahathir's comment was also "a cynical means for Dr Mahathir to exploit domestic Muslim fears about US power, and continue his divisive campaign to keep Asia 'Asian' and Australia out of regional forums such as Asean".

The editorial said there was "no doubt Dr Mahathir wanted to shore up support for his autocratic administration".

"However, it is disappointing for someone who has co-operated with investigating Muslim extremists on his own soil to isolate Australia from the rest of Southeast Asia over our alliance with the US.

"Dr Mahathir's claim that our upgraded travel warnings are unfair is also preposterous. Australians died in Bali, so did many Asians, mainly Balinese. All peoples in our region are threatened by terrorism.

"This chilling reality has not deterred some of Asia's political elites from exploiting the bad press Australia is getting in parts of Southeast Asia over incidents such as the ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation) raids on people suspected of having links with Jemaah Islamiah."

The newspaper said Dr Mahathir's "brash remarks", President Megawati Sukarnoputri's "conspicuous silence" when it came to hosing down anti-Australian sentiments and the conspiracy theories peddled by moderate Islamic leaders all underline the need for closer engagement with the region.

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