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Parliament-Anwar

ACCUSATIONS AGAINST DR MAHATHIR UTTERLY WILD, SAYS ANWAR

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 19 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today said the allegation by 34 United States congressmen that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is anti-Jew and anti-Semitic is utterly wild.

Anwar, who is also Finance Minister, told the Dewan Rakyat here it was untrue that Dr Mahathir is anti-Jew and anti-Semitic.

The Prime Minister's track record would show that Dr Mahathir is an upholder of the principles of democracy and multi-racialism as evident in the country, Anwar said.

"To allege that Dr Mahathir is anti-Semitic is making a wild accusation. Who is a Semite? According to the Oxford Dictionary, a Semite is a member of any of the peoples supposedly descended from Shem, sons of Noah, including especially the Jews, Arabs, Assyrians, Babylonians and Phoenicians.

"Does that mean that Dr Mahathir dislikes all these races including the Arabs. Some people regard the Jews as the Children of Abraham. Not only Jews alone. All Muslims and Christians are also Children of Abraham," Anwar said.

He was tabling a motion to express the House's full support for Dr Mahathir as Prime Minister and object to the US investigation into investments by Petronas, the national oil corporation, in Iran.

Tabling of the motion followed a draft resolution by a group of US congressmen demanding Dr Mahathir to publicly apologise or resign over alleged statement of a Jewish conspiracy in Southeast Asian currency speculation.

Dr Mahathir had repeatedly clarified that his statement was misinterpreted and that he is not anti-Jew.

The motion was also in protest against the US' attempt to invoke its Iran-Libya Sanctions Act 1996 on Petronas for investing more than US\$20 million in a gas project in Iran.

Anwar said Dr Mahathir's statement on the involvement of international financier George Soros, who is a Jew, in currency speculation in the region was lifted out in bits and pieces that the prime minister was made to appear to be anti-Jew and anti-Semitic.

In this context, anyone reading Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice" randomly was bound to regard Shakespeare as anti-Jew for describing the bad sides of Shylock, the Jewish trader.

"Does this mean Shakespeare is anti-Jew? The decision depends on reading the whole corpus of Shakespeare's works," he said defending Dr Mahathir's statement which was taken out of context.

"We should look at what he (Dr Mahathir) had said in totality and more importantly, at what he had done," Anwar said.

Dr Mahathir, he said, had a sterling track record in fighting for multi-racial and multi-religious ideals in the country, the results of which were political stability and racial harmony.

Because of these factors, the country attained excellent growth levels, Anwar said.

On the 34 US congressmen's claim that Dr Mahathir was now also anti-US, Anwar said the government chose to move the motion in the Dewan Rakyat today because it respected and valued the good relations between Malaysia and the US.

"We have strong trade and economic ties with the United States and we have long-established relations with the United States with trade totalling RM\$66 billion last year," he said.

Anwar said the number of Malaysian students in the US now totalled 11,646, of whom 3,602 were government-sponsored.

"Therefore it is also illogical to say Malaysia is questioning its good relations with the United States. But just as the United States from time to time openly remarked about a sovereign and independent nation, we also have the right and freedom to comment on domestic and international developments," said Anwar.

On the motion's objection to the US investigation into Petronas' investment in Iran, Anwar said the government did not plan to extend any cooperation to the US investigating team.

US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Energy Sanctions and Commodities William Ramsay arrived here today for the Petronas probe.

He said the US' attempt to invoke its Iran-Libya Sanctions Act on Petronas was illogical because the move was not only unilateral but the law also contravened the principles of free trade.

"While we respect the right of any country to have their own laws and sanctions, we believe it is illogical for the United States to impose laws, applicable only in the United States, on Malaysia, its companies or its people," he said.

In this context, he said, invoking the Act to question Petronas' right to have joint investment with other companies in Iran was regrettable.

A tripartite consortium comprising Petronas, Total SA of France and Russia's Gazprom has invested US\$2 billion in a gas project in South Pars in Iran.

Dr Mahathir and French president Jacques Chirac, after their recent talks in Langkawi, announced Malaysia and France's objection to the US' attempt to probe those companies. -- BERNAMA

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