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Americans told to be on the alert following death threats

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The United States Government has warned its citizens to be on the alert following two telephone calls to the embassy here from a man threatening to kill four Americans residing in Malaysia.

The calls which were received this morning were believed to have been made by the same person.

However, the caller did not specify the reason for the threats which came a day after the killing of four Americans in Karachi, Pakistan.

An embassy spokesman said the mission took the threats seriously in view of the killings in Pakistan and the resolution in the US Congress calling for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to resign or apologise for his so-called remarks on Oct 10 that a Jewish conspiracy was behind the depreciation of the ringgit and attacks on the stock markets in Southeast Asia.

(Dr Mahathir had clarified on Oct 11 that he did not say efforts to impede the economy of Malaysia and other Muslim countries were due to a Jewish conspiracy).

The spokesman could not determine at this juncture if the calls were genuine.

"We are trying to determine if the calls are genuine or not.

"The US Government, however, views such threats seriously.

"In the meantime, we have done everything possible to warn Americans in Malaysia," said the spokesman.

Relations between both countries are strained following the US decision to investigate Petronas' involvement in a gas and oil project in Iran.

Petronas, together with Gazprom of Russia and Total of France, have signed a US\$2 billion (RM6.6 billion) deal with Iran to develop part of the giant South Pars gas field.

Given these recent developments, the spokesman advised American citizens to be more alert.

"If they are threatened or if they see suspicious characters in their vicinity, they should contact the police immediately.

"They should also alert the embassy," he said.

The embassy's Press officer, James Warren, said the mission had contacted the relevant authorities to investigate the calls.

However, he declined comment when asked if the authorities were the police and Wisma Putra.

City police chief Datuk Bakri Omar confirmed that an investigation was being carried out and said police had yet to trace the caller.

"At this juncture, we do not know if the calls were made by pranksters or those with the real intent to kill," he said.

Meanwhile, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Ong Ka Ting said US citizens should not be duly alarmed by the calls as the Government would not allow anyone to take the law into their hands.

"The Home Ministry guarantees any attempt to disrupt peace will be dealt with severely," he said, adding that police would decide if additional security measures should be provided to American citizens here.

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