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Barisan Nasional pledges support for Dr M

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THE Barisan Nasional (BN) supreme council yesterday expressed regret over a draft resolution by 34 US congressmen calling on Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to resign.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the BN leadership also regrets the US congressmen's allegation that the Prime Minister is anti-Jewish.

Anwar told a news conference after chairing a one-and-a-half-hour special meeting of the BN supreme council in Kuala Lumpur that all 13 BN component parties have reaffirmed their support for Dr Mahathir, who is also the BN chairman.

"We stress that only the rakyat, through democratic process, can decide on the country's leadership," he said.

After securing a mandate from BN component party leaders at yesterday's meeting, Anwar said he will table a motion of confidence in Dr Mahathir's leadership at the Dewan Rakyat today.

He said members of Parliament will have a one-day sitting to debate the motion when it is tabled at the Dewan Rakyat at 3.30pm today.

In a letter to Dr Mahathir dated October 27 and signed by 34 congressmen led by Mr Robert Wexler (Democrat-Florida), the congressmen called on the Prime Minister to publicly apologise or resign for his alleged "inflammatory" anti-American and anti-Jewish remarks.

The draft resolution has not yet been introduced or discussed in the US House of Representatives, but has been circulated among members as Congress will recess for 11 weeks, starting November 13.

Dr Mahathir had on several occasions clarified that his statement blaming US financier George Soros for the region's currency crisis was misinterpreted and that he is not anti-Jewish.

Anwar said based on the evidence of Dr Mahathir's leadership, the BN leaders deny allegations of the Prime Minister's animosity towards any racial group, be it at home or abroad, including Jews.

"We, the BN leadership, reiterate that Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural nation. And the philosophy behind the BN's cause is the moulding of this pluralism into a force to build a strong and prosperous country, successful in every field," he said.

He said the BN supreme council affirms that Dr Mahathir, as the BN chairman and Prime Minister, has clearly implemented this ideal and translated it into reality.

Anwar added that under the Prime Minister's leadership, Malaysia has emerged as a model multi-racial nation, built on the principles of tolerance, justice and mutual respect.

He said the BN component parties also stress that Malaysia, under Dr Mahathir's leadership, highly values good relations with other countries.

He said BN leaders are aware of the importance of Malaysia-US ties and will maintain and enhance such relations.

Asked about US Ambassador John Malott's statement on Monday that the draft resolution by 34 US congressmen against Dr Mahathir is inappropriate, Anwar said, "We have said that before. I think he is just endorsing that statement".

On the motion of confidence to be tabled at the Dewan Rakyat today, Anwar said, "We'll wait for the motion in Parliament tomorrow. Then we'll convey it to those concerned and the US Government."

On whether the motion will demand retraction of the congressmen's draft resolution against the Prime Minister, Anwar said, "No."

Later, Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told reporters that Dr Mahathir has the overwhelming support of the BN component parties, whose leaders stand firmly behind the Prime Minister as they support his policy.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the US congressmen have no right to ask Dr Mahathir to resign.

Ling, who is also Transport Minister, said as a democratic country, the US could not ask an elected leader of a country to resign.

"Aren't you (the Americans) practising double standards?" he queried.

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik described the congressmen's draft resolution as racial and containing hidden agenda.

MIC president and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, meanwhile, encouraged the people to back their elected representatives in Parliament who will voice their support for the Prime Minister when the motion of confidence in Dr Mahathir is tabled today.

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