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BN pledges support for PM (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Barisan Nasional today pledged its support for Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, saying Malaysia had become a model of a multi-racial society based on tolerance, justice and mutual respect under his leadership.

The 14-party coalition expressed its confidence in Dr Mahathir as both Prime Minister and BN chairman.

The stand was taken at a supreme council meeting of the coalition at Menara Dato Onn, which was called following the action by 34 United States Congressmen to move a draft resolution in the US Congress calling on Dr Mahathir to apologise for his alleged anti-Jewish remarks, failing which, he should resign as Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir had, on several occasions, clarified that he did not say that a Jewish conspiracy was behind the attacks on several Southeast Asian currencies.

Speaking at a Press conference after chairing the two-hour meeting, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said as political parties which continually participated in elections, the BN reaffirmed that only the rakyat, through the democratic process, had the right to choose their leaders.

Reading from a prepared statement, Anwar, who is Umno deputy president, said Malaysia's success attested to the Prime Minister's leadership, and the BN rejected allegations that Dr Mahathir had grudges against any race in or outside the country, including Jews.

Asked whether the BN's stand would be conveyed to the US Government, he said: "A motion of confidence in Dr Mahathir will be tabled in Parliament tomorrow. Its outcome and the BN's position will then be made known to the US Government as well as all concerned parties."

Later, Dr Mahathir was asked on the supreme council's endorsement of his leadership after opening the one-village-one-product campaign and Oita Prefecture 1997 Tourism Promotion at the Mall here.

Dr Mahathir said the council was expressing its feelings on the matter.

"That is the feeling that they have. I think they have a need to express it," he said.

The parties which attended today's meeting were Umno, MIC, MCA, Gerakan, Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Sarawak, Sarawak United People's Party, People's Progressive Party, Sarawak National Party, Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak, Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat, Sabah Liberal Democratic Party, Sabah Progressive Party, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah and Parti Demokratik Sabah.

Among those present were MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, PBDS president Datuk Leo Moggie, Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, People's Progressive Party president Datuk M. Kayveas and SUPP vice-chairman Datuk Law Hieng Ding.

Also present were BN secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin and executive secretary Datuk Yaacob Mohamed.

Anwar said Dr Mahathir had pursued the country's ideals and policies and made them a reality.

"We (the BN), therefore, regret the allegations by the 34 Congressmen that Dr Mahathir is anti-Jew and their move calling for him to apologise or resign."

Anwar stressed that Malaysia, under Dr Mahathir's leadership, valued good ties with other countries.

"In this matter, we realise the importance of ties between Malaysia and the US and will strive to maintain good relations."

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the firm stand taken by the BN, besides rejecting outright the demand of the Congressmen, would convey a clear signal that Dr Mahathir had the full support of the people.

Abdullah, who is also Foreign Minister, said Dr Mahathir commanded overwhelming support among BN component parties.

"The BN, under the leadership of Dr Mahathir, has pursued the ideals and policies of the country, that of tolerance and multi-ethnic harmony."

He said the people had the right to "be angry" over the Congressmen's action which challenged the country's sovereignty.

Dr Ling said the message the BN had conveyed today was clear and simple, and it was that Malaysia was an independent and sovereign nation.

"Nobody should come and interfere with our affairs. Our Prime Minister is democratically elected and we are giving him our full support.

"How can the United States unilaterally and extra-territorially try and undermine somebody who has been democratically elected? Isn't the US practising double standards?"

Dr Ling hoped good sense would prevail in the end because "there are more important things to deal with on the international and national agenda".

Dr Lim said as a BN component party, Gerakan was 100 per cent behind the coalition's stand.

Kayveas said Dr Mahathir was not only a fair leader but one who spoke on behalf of the region and the Third World on pertinent issues.

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