

21/11/1997

Clear message has been sent

THAT Malaysians would overwhelmingly endorse Wednesday's motion of confidence in the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the face of US's unilateral actions was a foregone conclusion. Knowing this and yet choosing to go through the elaborate due process eminently demonstrates that the people do not take lightly actions by outsiders which challenge the nation's sovereignty.

With the unanimous vote in the august Dewan Rakyat and the people's outpouring of support for the Government in the past weeks to repudiate the US's applying extra-territoriality, a clear message has been sent. As a sovereign nation with a democratically-elected Government, we brook no interference in our domestic affairs and the way we conduct commercial business with others.

The five-point motion adopted after nearly five hours of debate is not the culmination of emotionalism on the part of Malaysians as our detractors would like to conclude. Far from it. Rather it epitomises a country whose people cannot easily be trampled on. As Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has quite rightly stressed, the intention of the motion is none other than to demonstrate that "we have dignity".

It is precisely because the 34 US Congressmen's proposed resolution to censure Dr Mahathir is way out of line that we have to speak up. It is a matter of principle. Malaysians' categorical response shows our contempt for actions which exceeded the norms of diplomatic engagement by the world's single superpower which so vehemently champions democracy around the globe. That the US, a staunch supporter of freedom to trade, threatens to impose sanctions on Petronas and other investors in the Iranian South Pars gas project goes against the very aspiration of the World Trade Organisation. Hence, the Malaysian stand not to co-operate in the US investigation into the Petronas investment shows we are not afraid to stand up for our rights. In fact, the appropriateness of the Malaysian response starkly reminds Asians of the time-tested maxim that "If you are tempted to slander someone, don't. Our mouths are meant for ingesting food, not for speaking indiscriminately against another."

Now that the US actions have caused so much flak, it is left to be seen whether the Congressmen will still proceed with tabling the Wexler resolution which calls on Dr Mahathir to apologise or resign over "anti-Jewish" remarks which he never made. In the event that this small group does not have the good sense to withdraw the resolution which has already been criticised by some at home, it is hoped that the majority in the US administration will look at the issues at hand maturely and objectively. Certainly there are already too many urgent problems in the US national and international agenda to allow these vexing issues to remain unresolved, engendering even more anger against the US.

Malaysia, on its part, has re-emphasised in yesterday's motion that it wants to "ensure the continuity of good relations with the US in all aspects and to enhance relations". Anwar also noted that Malaysia has excellent diplomatic relations with the US. Trade with that country increased to RM66 billion last year. There are 11,646 Malaysian students in the US. As one reader of this paper so rightly concluded in his recent letter calling on the US to be rational, there is "more greatness in magnanimity and tolerance."

(END)