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Dewan Rakyat passes motion of confidence in PM

Fadzil Ghazali

MALAYSIA adopted a parliamentary motion of confidence in Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's leadership which also registered the country's strong objection against a letter sent by 34 US congressmen last month demanding that the Prime Minister steps down.

The motion made in the Dewan Rakyat was also in reaction to a US probe into Petronas' investments in Iran.

Members of Parliament voted unanimously in support of the motion after a four-hour debate. The House has 192 members: 168 from the ruling Barisan Nasional and 24 from the Opposition parties.

In moving the motion of confidence in Dr Mahathir, his deputy and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim called on the House to acknowledge Malaysians' confidence in the leadership of the Prime Minister.

Anwar told members of Parliament that Malaysia should view seriously a letter dated October 27 sent by the 34 US congressmen to Dr Mahathir, accusing him of being "anti-Semite".

The nation should also express regret over the US Government's effort to use the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act 1996 on Petronas for the national oil corporation's investment in the Iranian gas sector, he added.

Anwar said the 34 US congressmen had taken the Prime Minister's statement out of context.

Semites, Anwar quoted from the Oxford Dictionary, are descendants of Shem, sons of Noah, including Jewish people, Arabs, Assyrians, Babylonians and Phoenicians.

"In my opinion, to accuse Dr Mahathir as anti-Semite is baseless. It is ridiculous to accuse the Prime Minister of hating Jews, Arabs, Syrians and Babylonians."

In the same vein, he said, William Shakespeare cannot be accused of being anti-Jewish just because in the "Merchant of Venice" he portrays Jewish merchant Shylock as a negative character.

On the US probe into Petronas dealings in Iran, Anwar said the Clinton Administration's decision to impose the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act on Petronas is deeply regretted.

"While we respect a country's right to introduce laws and regulations, we do not believe it is proper for the US to make a law that demands other countries to adhere to as well.

"In this context, the Act, which denies Petronas the right to do business with other companies in Iran, is deeply regretted.

"Therefore, the Government has no intention of giving any form of cooperation to the US team that is entrusted to conduct the investigations on Petronas."

Anwar said it is difficult to accept the unilateral move by the US to force the international community to accept its law without first referring it to international forums such as the World Trade Organisation.

Under the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, passed by the US Congress last year, the US President is required to impose sanction on any foreign companies investing more than US\$20 million (US\$1 = RM3.46) in Iranian and Libyan energy sectors.

In underscoring Malaysians' confidence in Dr Mahathir, Anwar said under his leadership Malaysia's economy has prospered and the country has become a model for other countries with diverse ethnic, religious and cultural

composition.

"There are many countries that talk of civil rights, democracy and respecting the culture and religions of all ethnics. However, their preachings are not reflected by their administration," he added.

Anwar said but in Malaysia, the Government has opted for a principle that recognises all races, and implements a fair and just system that protects the interests of all.

"In Islam, such a principle is observed. We recognise diversity as one of God's creations, and we try to respect the existence of this diversity," he added.

Anwar said the spirit of implementing democracy that recognises this diversity is highly evident under the leadership of Dr Mahathir, who has turned this principle into reality.

"Malaysia's economy is getting stronger despite the existing regional problem. But what is clear is that the country's economy and the solidarity among the rakyat are stronger now than before," he added.

The motion also noted that Malaysia values its ties with the US. Last year, the bilateral trade stood at RM66 billion. There are some 11,646 Malaysian students in the US.

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