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Motion of confidence in PM passed (HL)

Ashraf Abdullah; Jeffrey Ramayah; Alex Choong; Hayati Hayatudin
KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Dewan Rakyat today voted in favour of a motion of confidence supporting the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The unprecedented motion also dismissed the draft resolution by the 34 United States Congressmen asking Dr Mahathir to either make a public apology for his alleged anti-Semitic and anti-American remarks or resign.

The motion, tabled by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and seconded by MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, also denounced any form of investigation by the US on Petronas for its investment in the gas industry in Iran.

Deputy Speaker Ong Tee Keat announced the decision after the voice vote was taken at 7.45pm. There were 117 MPs in the House, but those from the DAP, Pas and PBS were absent when the motion was put to vote.

The Dewan Rakyat comprises of 168 Barisan Nasional MPs, DAP (9), Pas (7), PBS (7) and Star (1).

The motion was debated for 4 1/2 hours.

Replying to points raised during the debate, Anwar said the motion was important although the congressional resolution had not been passed because it involved the nation's sovereignty and dignity.

"We don't want foreigners to undermine our credibility and integrity. We want to send a clear message to them that we are solidly in support of the Prime Minister.

"What we do not accept is the tone of the resolution and the letter to the Prime Minister which exceeded the norms of diplomatic engagement and transgressed what we would term as polite message."

"They have gone overboard by demanding that Dr Mahathir apologise or resign," he said.

Anwar expressed disappointment that the DAP did not support the motion and was more receptive to the Congressmen's arguments and reports of the foreign media than the explanation given by Malaysia's own leaders.

"The DAP considered this motion as an attempt to deviate our attention from the problems that we are facing.

"There is no intention whatsoever to deviate. Our only aim is to ensure continued economic growth, national development and ensure that our sovereignty as an independent nation is not trampled upon.

"The progress achieved by the nation so far was not brought about by the Opposition. The strong economic growth and success was due to the leadership of Dr Mahathir.

He said there was a need to send a clear message to the Congressmen that Malaysia, as a sovereign State, had prestige and dignity. "We will not allow outsiders to take away our dignity."

He said all responsible Malaysians who loved their country should feel hurt and disappointed when their leader, who was democratically elected, was criticised.

"To denounce the fact that as a multi-racial and multi-religious country, Malaysia could live in harmony, is something that we cannot accept or tolerate.

"In fact, I would advise the 34 Congressmen to learn from Malaysia how a country with various ethnic groups can live peacefully."

He said as a sovereign State, Malaysia could not tolerate outside interference in its system of governance.

Anwar also explained that Malaysia's policy on Israel and its opinion of the Jews in general should be differentiated.

"Our policy is clear. We reject the ill-treatment of Israelis of the Arabs. But this has to be differentiated with our opinion on the Jews in general because not all of them are involved in the atrocities on Arabs."

Anwar also expressed disappointment that Pas did not support the motion.

"While Kelantan Menteri Besar and the head of the Pas' council of leaders Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat had sent a letter of support to the Prime Minister, its deputy president Abdul Hadi Awang did not support the motion.

"It is clear that even within this party, there are two sects."

Earlier, when tabling the motion, Anwar said Dr Mahathir was not against any race or religion.

"Under Dr Mahathir's leadership, racial tolerance and national unity became stronger than ever before," Anwar said, adding that the Prime Minister's statement on the Jews was taken out of context.

"We should not interpret his statement in bits and pieces and conclude that he is anti-Jewish," he said.

He added that in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, Shylock was a Jewish merchant.

"But is Shakespeare anti-Jewish? The decision depends on whether one reads Shakespeare's work in totality," he said.

Anwar said the accusation that Dr Mahathir was Anti-Semitic, was baseless.

"Who are the Semites? The Oxford dictionary says a Semite is a member of any of the peoples supposedly descended from Shem, son of Noah, including the Jews, Arabs, Assyrians, Babylonians and Phoenecians."

He said it would be ridiculous to suggest that Dr Mahathir was against all these races, including the Arabs.

Anwar said Malaysia's pluralistic society, with different races and religions living in harmony, had become a model for the international community.

He said if there were foreign forces which questioned Malaysia's racial unity and tolerance, the Government and the people would strongly react to it.

He said Dr Mahathir, during his term of office, managed to translate the principle of racial unity to reality.

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

Anwar said Dr Mahathir's leadership would continue to be defended.

He also said although the spillover of economic problems in the region, had to a certain degree affected Malaysia, it had nevertheless, reached tremendous economic success.

"Malaysia's economic achievements, social integration, and excellent diplomatic engagements, would have been impossible if all races in Malaysia were not united.

"This is the Prime Minister's track record. We have to evaluate his role, and contribution to the nation," he said.

Anwar said Malaysia had excellent diplomatic relations with the US.

"Trade with US increased to RM66 billion last year. There are 11,646 Malaysian students in the US, of whom 3,602 are Government sponsored," he said.

As such, Anwar added, the good relations with the US should not be questioned.

However, he said, as the US exercises its rights to speak up on certain issues openly, Malaysia, as a sovereign State, also had the right to do

so.

Anwar said the unilateral decision by the US to impose the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, 1996 on other nations, without raising the matter in a proper forum or with international institutions like the World Trade Organisation could not be accepted.

"While we respect the rights of any nation to impose sanctions on others, we think it is ridiculous for the US to force others to adhere to the Act."

Anwar said the US attempt to force Malaysia and Petronas to accept the Act, was regretted.

"As such, Malaysia has no plans to give any co-operation to the US to investigate the Petronas investment."

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