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State leaders denounce US Congressmen's move

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - All nine Menteri Besar and four Chief Ministers today condemned the move by the 34 United States Congressmen asking Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to apologise or resign as the country's leader following his alleged "anti-American and anti-Semitic" remarks.

The State leaders said they also supported all actions that had been or would be taken by Dr Mahathir in handling the country's economic problems.

In a letter dated Oct 27, the US Congressmen had demanded that Dr Mahathir make a public apology over his alleged remarks, failing which he should resign as Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir had clarified that he did not say that a Jewish conspiracy was behind efforts to impede the economies of Malaysia and other Muslim countries.

The 13 State leaders signed a resolution today which was handed over to Dr Mahathir before the start of the second day meeting of the 177th Rulers' Conference at Istana Negara.

At a Press conference later, Terengganu Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, speaking on behalf of the other State leaders, said the Congressmen had no right to interfere in Malaysia's domestic affairs.

He also gave to reporters copies of the resolution signed by the 13 State leaders.

Also present were Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad and Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

The 13 signatories were Wan Mokhtar, Mohamad Isa, Koh, Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Shahidan Kassim, Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, Perak Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Abu Zahar Isnin, Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud and Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee.

The brief resolution reads:

"We, the Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers in Malaysia, strongly object to the intervention of the 34 US Congressmen in Malaysia's domestic affairs. We fully support all actions that have been or will be taken by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Malaysian Government and her people to overcome all economic problems and challenges and to protect the country's dignity."

However, Wan Mokhtar said the resolution was only directed at the 34 Congressmen and not all Americans.

"The American Congressmen should not interfere in our domestic affairs.

"We Malaysians are the ones who elected Dr Mahathir as our leader, so who are the US Congressmen to meddle in our domestic affairs?" he asked, adding that all the State leaders were disturbed by the letter sent by the Congressmen to Dr Mahathir.

At its weekly meeting yesterday, the Cabinet had also condemned the draft resolution of the 34 Congressmen.

In another development, the Youth wings of five Barisan Nasional component parties delivered a protest note to the US Government over moves to probe Petronas' business dealings in Iran and the draft resolution by the Congressmen.

A delegation comprising representatives of Umno, MCA, MIC, Gerakan and PPP Youth wings, led by Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, handed the aide-memoire to Jeffrey Lunstead, Counsellor for Political Affairs at the US Embassy here.

Others in the delegation were Umno Youth assistant secretary Saifudin Nasution Ismail, PPP Youth chief R.O. Paramasipam, MCA Youth vice-chairman Hoo Seong Chan, Gerakan Youth secretary-general Lum Weng Keong and MIC Youth secretary-general Datuk Dr Nelson Nathan.

The leaders were cheered on by about 50 Youth members, some carrying posters and banners with messages of support for Dr Mahathir, when they entered the embassy for the 20-minute meeting.

US Undersecretary for Trade Stuart Eizenstat was quoted as saying in Rome on Friday that Petronas and four other companies ran the risk of drawing US sanctions if investigations showed that their business dealings had contravened the Iran-Libya Act 1996.

Petronas, Gazprom of Russia and Total of France have signed a US\$2 billion (RM6.6 billion) joint venture deal with Iran to develop part of the giant South Pars gas field.

Two others - Canada's Bow Valley and Indonesia's Bakrie Group - are also believed to have signed agreements with Iran.

Speaking to reporters later, Zahid said Lunstead promised that the note would be conveyed to the State Department in Washington.

He said although the resolution had yet to be passed, the BN Youth wings felt the move by the 34 Congressmen was irresponsible and an attempt to interfere in Malaysia's internal affairs.

Zahid said Umno Youth would also e-mail the protest note to all US Congressmen in the next two or three days, calling on them not to entertain the draft resolution.

"The US must respect Malaysia's sovereignty. It is our right to establish diplomatic and trade relations with any country as long as it does not contravene any sanctions imposed by the United Nations."

He said the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, which was approved by Congress, was applicable only in the US and any attempt to enforce it elsewhere would be contrary to the spirit of freedom and sovereignty, adding that the US should not drag Malaysia into its political conflicts with other countries.

Asked to comment on the threat against Americans received over the phone by the embassy today, Zahid said: "I hope the two calls are only a hoax. We are not fighting Americans but some of the country's unfair policies."

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