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US congressional move inappropriate, says Malott

Kamarul Yunus

US AMBASSADOR to Malaysia John Malott admits that the proposed US congressional resolution asking Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to resign is "inappropriate" but wants Malaysians to stop the US-bashing.

"I agree that it is inappropriate to call upon the leader of a foreign country to resign. There - I said it, and I probably have just gotten 34 members of the Congress mad at me - people who have some influence over me and my future.

"But I am willing to display this political courage in talking about the resolution because I believe it is the right thing to do and because I believe so strongly in the importance of our relationship.

"I hope that in the days and weeks ahead, I can count on Malaysian Government leaders, businessmen and the press to show a similar determination," he told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Malott also reminded the press not to make his comments about the congressional resolution as their headlines today and miss the far important part of his message, that "enough is enough".

"My message today (yesterday) is about the importance of our relationship and the growing partnership that we have been building.

"... everyone, on both sides of the ocean, needs to treat our important relationship with all the care and respect it deserves," he added.

Pre-empting the journalists first question would be on the congressional resolution, Malott said firstly, he noted that the resolution also stresses the importance that the US Congress attaches to the US-Malaysia relations.

"Secondly, members of the Congress have a right to express their concern about the alleged remarks of the Prime Minister, as reported by the Malaysian press, just as Malaysian leaders have a right to comment on our statements or policies.

"But I agree that it is inappropriate to call upon the leader of a foreign country to resign," he added

The congressional resolution, introduced by Mr Robert Wexler (Democrat-Florida), calls on the Prime Minister to apologise or resign for his alleged "inflammatory" anti-American and anti-Jewish remarks.

However, the draft resolution has not yet been introduced nor discussed in the US House of Representatives, but merely circulated to members as the Congress goes on recess for 11 weeks from November 13.

Acknowledging that the past four months have been a difficult time for Malaysia, Malott, who has been the US Ambassador to Malaysia for two years, said to a lesser extent, it has also affected the US-Malaysia relations.

"This is because of the financial crisis that has been gripping the region as well as the haze and the economic losses that the haze had caused. But, it is also because the rhetoric surrounding the relationship has worsened, and public opinion has been affected," he added.

In view of this, Malott urged both Malaysians and the Americans to put an end to emotionalism and be more responsible in what they say or write.

"Let us try to control this ugly atmosphere rather than contribute to it. Our relationship is too important not to do so," he said.

He also echoed his concern about the growing apparent belief among some people that there is some benefit to be derived from engaging in US-

bashing and "thrashing" the ties between the US and Malaysia.

"I am concerned about the growing tendency to blame everything that is happening on foreigners, usually Americans, or on the foreign press, usually American-owned.

"I am shocked to read editorial opinions that the sale of foreign publications should be banned in Malaysia, or that the Central Intelligence Agencies is conspiring with the foreign press to manipulate the stock market.

"This is nonsense, as everyone knows, but why is it being said? I am surprised when an American television network is blamed for the decline in foreign tourists in Malaysia, when we all know that it is the haze from the forest fires in Indonesia that was responsible.

"And when my embassy receives phone calls threatening to kill me and other Americans in Malaysia, we carry out our legal and moral responsibility to inform the American community, and then I read a charge in the newspapers that my embassy is not doing its job to improve ties between our two countries.

"That is like blaming the victim for the crime. Why not condemn the people who threatened our lives instead?" he asked.

However, he is happy and pleased to note the quick response and cooperation from the Malaysian police in investigating into the threat calls.

On whether he was informed of the clarification by Dr Mahathir reported the next day after he was alleged to have made an anti-Jewish remarks, Malott acknowledged that he was informed and so was the US Government.

He said the members of Congress were also aware of the clarification but some of them were not satisfied with it.

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