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US Congressmen's move condemned (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Cabinet today condemned the draft resolution of the 34 United States Congressmen and their letter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad over his alleged "anti-American and anti-Semitic" remarks.

In the draft resolution and in the letter dated Oct 27, the Congressmen had demanded that Dr Mahathir make a public apology, failing which he should resign as Prime Minister.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim told a Press conference at his Finance Ministry office that the Cabinet felt there should not be any interference in Malaysia's domestic affairs.

"While we appreciate the fact that countries, individuals or groups have the right to make comments or even criticise some of our policies, the Cabinet feels that the tone of the resolution and the letter had exceeded the norms of diplomatic engagement and exceeded what we would term as polite and decent message."

Anwar said he would table a motion in the Dewan Rakyat soon in support of the Prime Minister and to condemn the draft resolution of the 34 Congressmen and the letter which they had sent to Dr Mahathir.

He said the Cabinet regretted the draft resolution and the letter sent to the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir had clarified that he did not say efforts to impede the economy of Malaysia and other Muslim countries were due to a Jewish conspiracy.

"The Cabinet objects very strongly to the contents of the resolution and the letter, particularly to their (Congressmen's) insistence that the Prime Minister make a public apology, failing which he should resign," Anwar said.

Anwar said an emergency meeting of the Barisan Nasional would be convened before the motion was tabled at the earliest possible date during the current session of the Dewan Rakyat.

The Cabinet, he said, reiterated its confidence in and support of the leadership of the Prime Minister.

"Dr Mahathir was elected and endorsed by the party, through the democratic process. We have to respect democratic rules. We cannot be dictated by others, what more foreigners. We cannot accept any form of foreign interference in the domestic politics of this country."

Anwar made it clear that Malaysia was a multi-racial and multi-religious country and would not budge from its strong belief and policy that all races and religions should be respected.

"This policy had been further strengthened by Dr Mahathir after he took office as Prime Minister in 1981. Therefore, the question that we are against a certain race, including Jews, does not arise at all," he said.

Anwar added that it was ridiculous, unwise, inappropriate and undemocratic for any country or Congressman to demand that the leader of a sovereign and independent country make a public apology or resign.

Asked whether he was confident that the Opposition would support his motion in Parliament, Anwar said:

"I believe that in the interest of protecting our integrity and independence, we need to send a clear and united message to the Congressmen. We must declare our unequivocal support for Dr Mahathir.

"I hope they (the Opposition) will support the motion."

He said at the moment, relations between Malaysia and the US were not affected by the actions of the 34 Congressmen.

"This is because the resolution has not been passed," he said.

On the US intention to investigate Petronas investment in Iran, Anwar said the Cabinet today rejected any form of investigation on Petronas.

"We would like to state categorically that Malaysian companies have every right to embark on any investment or economic activities elsewhere.

"Therefore, while welcoming any visit by any quarters, including US officials to Malaysia, a free and open country, we will not entertain any form of investigation on Petronas."

On Monday, Bernama quoted a US Embassy spokesman as saying that an official would be coming here on Nov 18 to investigate Petronas' business dealings in Iran.

The official has been identified as US Deputy Secretary of State for Energy, Sanctions and Commodities, Ambassador William Ramsay.

In a statement today, Wisma Putra said according to the US Embassy Ramsay would be here to explain the country's Iran-Libya Sanction Act.

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 Act.

Petronas, the national oil corporation, 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.

Under the controversial law, the US Government may take action against any company that invests more than US\$20 million a year in the oil and gas sector in Iran and Libya.

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