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Parliament-WindingUp

US OFFICIAL NO RIGHT TO PROBE PETRONAS, DEWAN RAKYAT TOLD

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 10 (Bernama) -- The government may not agree to the decision by the United States to send an official from its Trade Department to investigate Petronas on its business dealings with Iran, the Dewan Rakyat was told today.

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Nazri Aziz said the US had no right whatsoever to intervene in the affairs of this country including that involving Petronas.

" Even if we trade with Iran, the US has no right to interfere," he said when winding up the debate at committee stage on the 1998 Budget for the Prime Minister's Department.

Petronas, the national oil corporation, Gazprom of Russia, Total of France, Canada's Bow Valley and Indonesia's Bakrie Group have signed a US\$2 billion joint-venture deal with Iran to develop part of the giant South Pars gas field.

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.

On a suggestion that Malaysia refuse travelling visa for the official, Nazri said the matter was under the jurisdiction of the Home Ministry.

Lim Guan Eng (DAP-Kota Melaka), who raised the issue, said Malaysia should take stern action to avert US interference in the country's domestic affairs.

As a sovereign country with its government elected by the people, Malaysia should be respected and not treated similarly to that of Myanmar.

Nazri, who disagreed with Lim for using Myanmar as a comparison, said the US always practised double standards when taking action against other countries irrespective of whether the country practised democracy or otherwise.

" Grenada (an island nation near US) whose leaders were once elected by the people was also not spared from US'attacks merely because they were pro-communist," he said citing an example.

Lim also questioned the security measures at the Dewan Rakyat when Nazri told the House that those responsible for distributing stickers bearing the wordings "We Support Dr Mahathir" inside the dewan could not be identified.

" What is the guarantee that MPs including leaders of the country are free from bomb threats inside the dewan," Lim said.

To this, Nazri gave an assurance that security at the dewan was guaranteed.

On Petronas acquiring the Malaysian International Shipping Corporation (MISC) under the privatisation exercise, he said the government felt it was a wise move as the national oil company used MISC facilities to export its products.

He said the move would provide the synergy to Petronas to use the local shipping facilities which could contribute to the reduction in the deficit in the balance of payment.

On tenders for privatisation of MISC and Keretapi Tanah Melayu which were not open tenders, Nazri said the government chosed companies which could guarantee the future of the two companies.

He said the government wanted to ensure they would not suffer losses in

future.

The Dewan Rakyat will sit again tomorrow. -- BERNAMA

HJ TS