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Petronas-US

US REPRESENTATIVE FLIES INTO PROTEST BY YOUTH GROUP

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 19 (Bernama) -- US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Energy, Sanctions and Commodities William Ramsay flew in this afternoon and was handed a protest note from a youth group condemning his mission to probe a Petronas joint venture gas field project in Iran.

The US representative accepted the note without any comment from Malaysian 4B Youth movement president Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam.

"I handed over a letter of protest from the Belia 4B members and told him that we protest his investigation of Petronas. He took the letter and he moved away. He didn't say anything," said Mohd Ali who met Ramsay inside the airport terminal.

"I didn't introduce myself as a deputy minister because I was representing 4B Youth," said Mohd Ali who is Deputy Transport Minister.

Ramsay's arrival coincided with the tabling of a motion of confidence in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the Dewan Rakyat which also expressed objection to the US investigations into Petronas.

Accompanied by an aide, Ramsay eluded a large group of newsmen, television crews and a group of 30 demonstrators by leaving through a separate exit.

Also present was Saifuddin Abdullah, the secretary-general of the Malaysian Youth Council which represents two million youths and 33 affiliates.

"We welcome him as a guest but if his intention is to investigate Petronas, we will make more noise," he said as the demonstrators shouted "Hidup Petronas" and waved banners with messages such as "4B Movement Supports Dr Mahathir" and "Mahathir Is Our Prime Minister".

Ramsay is scheduled to meet Foreign Ministry Acting Under Secretary for American Division Mohd Arshad Manzoor Hussain tomorrow.

Yesterday, a Foreign Ministry official said the two would "exchange views" on the 1996 Iran-Libya Sanctions Act 1996 passed by the US threatening sanctions against companies which invest in excess of US\$20 million in either of the Arab countries.

Petronas has a 30 per cent stake in the US\$2 billion South Pars gas project. The other two partners are Total SA of France and Gazprom of Russia.

On Nov 12, the Foreign Ministry issued a statement that it was prepared to let Ramsay explain the rationale of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act but reiterated that the Act did not apply to Malaysia as it was a US legislation binding only on US citizens and American companies.

Petronas president Tan Sri Hassan Marican had said that it was up to the government whether to allow Ramsay to investigate Petronas because it belonged to the government.

Hassan said Petronas did not recognise unilateral sanctions and preliminary work on the South Pars project would continue.

"We are allowed to do business with countries we want to do business with. Our business will continue," he said. -- BERNAMA

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