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`Gore trying to incite unrest'

PENANG, Thurs. - Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today described US Vice-President Al Gore's statement as an attempt to incite civil unrest in the country.

He said Gore's speech at the Apec Business Summit dinner in Kuala Lumpur on Monday, had been made in an arrogant tone and could not be accepted by peace-loving Malaysians.

In the speech, Gore had voiced praise for the reformasi movement, describing the protesters as the "brave people of Malaysia".

Said Abdullah:

"By saying what he did, Gore was clearly trying to incite supporters of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to riot and adopt all kinds of violent means which should not happen in this country.

"That is why I say the United States should be held responsible if any undesirable incident occurs here."

Abdullah was speaking after visiting a flood relief centre in Kubang Menerong, after touring flood-hit areas in the Kepala Batas parliamentary constituency in Seberang Perai this afternoon.

Asked to comment on a memorandum of protest submitted by Barisan Nasional Youth to the US Ambassador in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Abdullah said he would study further developments before deciding on follow-up action.

However, he said he had already issued a written official statement on the matter, supported by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed.

In Johor Baru, Johor Umno hit out at Gore for condoning riots and street violence, saying the real motive was to interfere in Malaysia's internal affairs.

After a two-hour meeting last night, Johor Umno liaison committee chairman Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said US President Bill Clinton's endorsement of Gore's speech, was proof of his country's evil intentions towards Malaysia.

Ghani, who is Johor Menteri Besar, said Gore's rude remarks had tainted the Apec leaders' conference.

By describing those involved in the so-called reformasi movement as "brave Malaysians", Gore was inciting more people to join in street violence as a means to topple the democratically-elected Government, he said.

"Gore's action clearly shows that the US Government has plans to thwart Malaysia's financial policies as our measures are against their open market policies."

Ghani said during the meeting Johor Umno reaffirmed its undivided loyalty and support for Dr Mahathir.

In Kuching, Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Dr George Chan Hong Nam commended Dr Mahathir for displaying the composure of a "perfect host and statesman" during the summit.

"Gore certainly didn't know how to behave like a guest should. And yet, Dr Mahathir continued to smile away and shook hands with the leaders, including Gore.

"He (Dr Mahathir) acted like the perfect host and statesman, and this is something Malaysians are proud of," he said.

In Muar, the Johor Chinese Chamber of Commerce called on Gore to apologise to Dr Mahathir, the Malaysian Government and the people of

Malaysia for his blunt statement.

If Gore failed to apologise, the JCCC would launch a protest by promoting a State-wide campaign calling on traders and consumers to boycott American goods and stop all tours to the US, its vice-chairman Chua Tuan Meng said.

In Ipoh, Perak Umno Youth said Malaysians did not condone street violent and riots but used their democratic rights to decide who to elect.

Its leader, Jamal Nasir Rasdi, said in a statement that Gore was arrogant and had gone overboard when he openly supported those involved in the reformasi movement.

"Encouraging violence, riots and inciting others to kill is not the Malaysian way of choosing a Government," he said.

In Kuala Lumpur, former Cuepacs president A. Ragunathan described Gore's speech as highly deplorable and totally uncalled-for, and that his attitude to leave the hall after making his speech demonstrated the lack of decorum and etiquette.