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KL regrets US congressmen's bid to change Apec venue

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MALAYSIA yesterday expressed regret that two US congressmen had tried to persuade President Bill Clinton to seek a change in venue for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit to be held in Kuala Lumpur on November 16-18.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the move to link the choice of Apec summit venue with a proposed discussion on Malaysia's economic policies and human rights is "most regretted".

He said the US lawmakers' action represents another attempt at dictating to Malaysia in respect of its domestic affairs.

"We are not happy with this attitude... the arrogance, finger-pointing and condescension. They want to dictate what we should do," he told reporters after signing on behalf of the government three cooperation agreements with Ethiopia in Kuala Lumpur.

In a letter dated October 16 to Clinton, Republican congressmen Ben Gilman and Doug Bereuter expressed concern about Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's introduction of capital control measures and the detention of and alleged assault on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

While expressing support for Apec, the lawmakers urged Clinton "to explore the possibility of a different venue for the upcoming November meeting" of 21 Apec leaders.

"If this is not possible, we would urge you to speak out forcefully about the economic policies and human rights practices of Dr Mahathir," they were quoted as saying in the letter which was made public on Wednesday.

Abdullah said what Malaysia does is for the interest of the nation and "we have no intention to cause trouble for other countries".

"But they themselves (are insensitive to other countries) ... for instance when passing the Helms Burton and D'Amato laws, they did not take into account other countries' feeling... this is double-standard," he said.

On the other hand, when implementing selective capital control measures, Abdullah said Malaysia continues to encourage foreign direct investments and allow investors to repatriate their profits.

He also said that US congressmen are free to advise their President, like telling him not to visit China, but Clinton did anyway. The US President has said he would attend the Apec summit, Abdullah added.

On the statement by US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs Stanley Roth that Clinton's attendance at the Apec summit is not a state or official visit to Malaysia, Abdullah said there is no issue here.

"We understand that the leaders will be here to attend the multilateral Apec meeting... they are not here for official or state visits.

"And as of now, there is no plan for a bilateral meeting between Dr Mahathir and Clinton," he said.

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