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Malaysia objects to US lawmakers meddling

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Malaysia has expressed its objections to attempts by two United States lawmakers in urging President Bill Clinton to speak out against measures undertaken to revive its economy.

"Whatever measures implemented by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad are for the betterment of Malaysia and in our own interest," Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

"We do not take too kindly to arrogance, finger-pointing and a condescending attitude. We are not comfortable with them," he said during a media briefing at the Prime Minister's Department today.

Abdullah said this when asked to comment on an AFP report, datelined Washington, which reported that two prominent US lawmakers had asked Clinton to seek a change in venue for the annual Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit scheduled in Kuala Lumpur next month.

In a letter dated Oct 16, Republicans Ben Gilman and Doug Bereuter said the US President's attendance at the forum could be perceived as a US endorsement for Dr Mahathir.

Gilman, who chairs the International Relations Committee of the House of Representatives, and Bereuter, chairman of the Asia and Pacific sub committee, expressed concern about Dr Mahathir's attempts to tighten control over the currency and the detention of former deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

While expressing support for Apec, the lawmakers urged Clinton "to explore the possibility of a different venue for the 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 Prime Minister Mahathir," they said.

The lawmakers described Dr Mahathir's policies as "highly offensive and totally counter-productive to the much-needed efforts at the reform of the political and financial system inside his own country."

"We don't need them to teach us how to run our country," Abdullah said.

"They (the United States) should understand whatever (measures) we have implemented are for the betterment of Malaysia. We are not infringing on any other (country's) interests...It's not our intention and they should understand this."

Abdullah said when the US passed the Helms-Burton and d'Amato legislations, they did so without taking into consideration the sensitivity of others.

The d'Amato Law, also known as the US Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, was pushed for by Senator Alfonse d'Amato of New York and passed by Congress in late 1996. It contains provisions for sanctions by the US against foreign companies making investments of more than US\$20 million (RM76 million) a year in the oil and gas sector of the targeted countries. The US had voiced strong opposition to the Iran gas project, involving Petronas, which it said violated the Act.

The Helms-Burton law, also passed in the same year, tightens US economic sanctions against Cuba.

"These laws clearly show that the sovereignty of another nation is not considered by the United States."

On the suggestion by the US lawmakers for a change of venue for the Apec summit, Abdullah said it was their right to advise their President.

"Even in the past, US legislators had advised against President Clinton's visit to China, but he still went ahead anyway."

On the repeated statements by the State Department that Clinton's attendance at the summit was neither official nor state, Abdullah said there was no confusion whatsoever.

"As far as we are concerned, leaders attending the Apec summit are coming here not for an official or state visit and we clearly understand it."

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