

25 APR 1998

Congress-Mahathir

CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION ON DR MAHATHIR MAY NOT SURVIVE

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, April 25 (Bernama) -- The proposed US House of Representatives' resolution that demanded an apology from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his alleged remarks on Jews might die before it reached the House floor.

Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Doug Bereuter said here Friday that no action had so far been taken on the resolution.

"While there's intense concern about that, it would probably serve our interests if that resolution never reached the House floor, and I don't expect it to," the congressman told journalists and members of the Washington Roundtable for Asia Pacific Press (WRAPP).

"Unfortunately, 80 per cent of my job is dedicated to stopping bad legislations. That legislation is not necessarily bad, but I suspect it is inappropriate legislation," said Bereuter who is a Republican from Nebraska.

The resolution, introduced by Congressman Robert Wexler, a freshman Democrat from Florida, six months ago is currently co-sponsored or supported by 27 other members of the House. The resolution has not received any support from the Senate.

The resolution essentially demanded an apology from Dr Mahathir for his alleged anti-Jewish remarks and called on the prime minister to resign if he did not do so.

Bereuter described US-Malaysia relations as "important and generally positive (although) we face friction occasionally with the prime minister. He is outspoken."

The congressman said that he had discussed at length on the issue with Malaysian embassy officials, including Ambassador Datuk Dali Mahmud Hashim, who indicated that Dr Mahathir's statement was "misunderstood and misconstrued."

On April 7, Wexler sent a letter to Ambassador Dali expressing his disappointment with Dr Mahathir for his "unwillingness to offer an apology for his harmful remarks, or even to acknowledge that his statements are inappropriate, at a minimum implies that he does not reject such dangerous and anti-Semitic behaviour."

Wexler went further and hoped that Malaysia would consider normalisation of relations with Israel as a gesture and an indication to the US Congress and the Jewish community that the Malaysian government is sincere in enhancing relations with the Jewish people.

Neither the Malaysian embassy nor Wisma Putra have responded to Wexler's letter.

However, a group of 15 members of five American Jewish groups -- American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, B'nai B'rith International, and World Jewish Congress -- have made arrangements to meet with Ambassador Dali here next Thursday.

Barry Jacobs of the American Jewish Committee said that the group would meet on behalf of other Jewish organisations dissatisfied with the lack of response from the prime minister.

On a positive note, Congress recently appropriated US\$700,000 in funding for military training or IMET for Malaysia for fiscal year 1998, an increase from US\$600,000 last year.

Bereuter said the increase in funding was a good indication of positive

US-Malaysia relations. " I'm pleased to hear about it," he said.

The World Jewish Congress, in February said that it accepted that Dr Mahathir was not anti-Semitic.

Malaysia had written a letter to the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner in Geneva to deny that the prime minister was anti-Semitic and that anti-Semitism has never been the policy in Malaysia.

Malaysian ambassador to the high commission Hamidon Ali had written the letter dated Feb 20 after he met with the World Jewish Congress representative there, Morris Abram.

World Jewish Congress executive director Elan Steinberg had praised the letter and said that the matter had been brought to an end.

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