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Ghazzali

AMBASSADOR GHAZZALI BLASTS AT US MEDIA FOR IGNORANCE From Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, May 5 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Ambassador to the United States, Datuk Ghazzali Sheikh Abdul Khalid, Tuesday responded to a stinging Washington Post's editorial on Malaysia.

His letter, which was carried by the Post Tuesday, rejected the daily's claim that Malaysia's economy "was stuck in reverse" by pointing out recent figures by multilateral organisations and securities houses which project positive growth for Malaysia in the next couple of years.

The editorial headlined "Mahathir's Disgrace" which appeared on April 19, slammed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Malaysian judiciary, while supporting former deputy prime minister and finance minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his "liberal" economic ideas.

The Post also predicted that Parti Keadilan Nasional led by Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, which took to the streets to protest Anwar's arrest and conviction, would be the wave of Malaysia's future.

In reply, Ghazzali said: "The chief architect of Malaysia's progress and development for 18 years" has been the government led by Prime Minister Mahathir and of which Anwar had been a prominent member from 1982 until September 1998."

The achievements of the Malaysian government had been recognised by many and Malaysia is the only country to have formulated a comprehensive economic recovery plan .

"By all accounts this plan has proven to be effective," Ghazzali said.

On the judicial process, Ghazzali said: " The facts speak for themselves: The case is the longest in Malaysia's legal history, held over 78 days with 44 witnesses called to testify for the prosecution and defence; Mr Anwar was represented by nine lawyers of his own choosing; the hearing was open to the public, as well as to foreign observers and media; the trial was reported verbatim by the international and local media; and the judgement ran to 394 pages."

Clearly, the trial had gone through the due process of the law, and the principles of natural justice were steadfastly upheld at all times, the ambassador said in a letter dated April 20, which was heavily edited by the Washington Post.

"The fact that Mr Anwar's wife, Wan Azizah, has been able to form a political party to promote her political agenda is a testimony to the vibrancy and vitality of Malaysia's democratic system," Ghazzali said.

Meanwhile, The New York Times carried an op-ed piece titled "Malaysia's Low Tide" written by Anwar from his jail cell which appeared a day after he was found guilty of corruption and sentenced to six years in prison.

Anwar described Mahathir as a "power-crazed prime minister" determined to block the tide of reform. Anwar claimed that he was demolished and accused of being a "CIA agent" and a "puppet of Washington" so that "Dr Mahathir's slide from power could be stopped."

"I became dangerous because as Finance Minister I would not do Dr Mahathir's 'business as usual' and as a politician I had widespread support for my work toward democracy and civil society," Anwar wrote.

Ambassador Ghazzali responded to the article by saying that the op-ed piece "is a display of frustration by a man who by his own follies failed to become prime minister and now chooses to lay the blame on others."

Despite his disdain for the Malaysian judiciary, Anwar had not hesitated to sue the government, the prime minister, and the Malaysian

media. And the courts favoured Anwar when they granted an injunction against the public airing of any statements about his alleged sexual misconduct, Ghazzali said.

"Mr Anwar's economic remedies inspired by the International Monetary Fund aggravated the country's economic downturn. However, the government's recovery measures had reversed the damage done by Anwar and put Malaysia back on the path of steady growth," the ambassador wrote.

The New York Times in an article on "How Globalism Ruined an Asian Success Story" described Anwar's portrayal of Dr Mahathir as "simplistic."

"Political analysts here said Dr Mahathir mixes populist, anti-Western rhetoric with a sophisticated understanding of the global economy. Even critics credit him for fashioning a harmonious country out of a combustible mixture of Malays, ethnic Chinese and Indians.

"Likewise, Mr Anwar is no helpless victim. Analysts describe him as a skilled and even ruthless politician who did not hesitate to hand out his share of plum government contracts to solidify his power base. Mr Anwar has honed his image overseas, through a network of Western-style spin doctors," the New York Times wrote.

-- BERNAMA

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