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Resolution (Special Report)

US HOUSE RESOLUTION ON ANWAR STUCK ON CAPITOL HILL

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WASHINGTON, Nov 3 (Bernama) -- A resolution on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim recently submitted to the United States House of Representative may not have much of a chance this year as lawmakers squabble with the White House over the federal budget, and headed home to campaign for the elections next Tuesday.

Hopes for a quick resolution on the federal budget, overdue since Oct 1, diminished as the White House and Republican leaders gridlocked over immigration laws, workplace safety, tax cuts and healthcare for senior citizens. Budget negotiations will resume after next week's elections on Tuesday, while the senate adjourned until mid-November.

President Bill Clinton's veto of the Treasury bill on Monday angered Republicans, some of whom accused the president of trying to shut down the government for political gain. The 1995 government shut down resulted in Republican losses at the polls the following year.

Meanwhile, the resolution on the former deputy prime minister and finance minister filed by a bipartisan group of seven lawmakers late last week would have to go through a lengthy process before it can reach the House floor for adoption.

With the Republican-controlled Congress and Democrat President Clinton stalled over the budget, lawmakers who will return to Washington after the elections and resume negotiations until the end of their term in January, are not likely to have the time for the resolution.

The resolution calls for a new trial for Anwar and urges the Malaysian government to provide him with "due process of law either by offering him a new trial under fair and transparent procedures or by dismissing all charges against him."

Keadilan Youth chief Ezam Mohamed Noor had disclosed to a Singapore daily that "friends of Anwar" had engaged a Washington-based lobby group, Janus Merritt Strategies, to promote the cause of the former deputy prime minister, currently serving a 15-year jail term for corruption and sodomy charges. Keadilan is reported to have paid US\$20,000 to the public relations firm.

In 1998, the US Senate adopted a resolution expressing sympathy for Anwar at the height of the political battle in Malaysia between Anwar and his mentor, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The House draft resolution would have to go to the subcommittee level, then the committee level before it can reach the House for adoption. A resolution is not legally binding but merely expresses Congressional sentiment about certain issues.

A political analyst here said it would be difficult for the "lame duck" lawmakers to pay attention to the resolution as they scramble to finish their already crowded agenda in such a short time.

Some Republican leaders are hoping that a victory for presidential nominee George W. Bush on election day would boost their standing in budget talks with a "lame-duck" president.

However, Republican leaders' bargaining power could diminish if Democratic candidate Al Gore wins Tuesday, or if Democrats seize control of the House of Representatives or the Senate where Republicans hold slim majorities.

A congressional staffer said: "There will be a new reality after the elections. Everything is going to look different and be different. We might as well wait."

-- BERNAMA

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