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US-Relations
PUTTING MALAYSIA-US RELATIONS ON RIGHT TRACK

By: A.Rahman Ahmad

KUALA LUMPUR, June 23 (Bernama) -- The lack of understanding on this region by the White House often creates a misunderstanding on Malaysia-United States relations which is often played up by the media, a US think-tank official said.

Kenneth E. Sheffer, the advisor to the President of the US Heritage Foundation, said lack of experience in foreign policy among Congressmen, who were elected on domestic issues, was another reason for the misunderstanding.

There should be an outreach programme to inform the Congress, influential people and significant journalists in the US about Malaysia, he told Bernama in an interview, here, recently.

"But there's nothing much being done towards this," he said, adding that Malaysia had an incredible success story yet untold in the U.S.

"It is booming but not being understood, this is the sad part," he said, describing the current Malaysia-US relationship as "positive behind the scene, but misunderstood publicly."

However, he said, one must not take media reports at face value but should try to understand what was behind them and what they meant.

Sheffer said the US wanted to work and cooperate with Malaysia to promote better ties and overcome suspicions that linger between the two sides.

Sheffer, who is on a fact-finding mission for the foundation, said he was here to establish ties with any think-tank organisation or research body to pass the barriers and to sit and examine all the things the US and Malaysia have in common.

He said the foundation, set up 25 years ago with a US\$25 million (RM62.5 million) budget, was the most influential conservative think-tank organisation among Congressmen, influential people and significant journalists in the US.

He said: "The foundation is a research organisation, not a starchy library of ideas. It is non-partisan and supports the ideas of candidates contesting in this year's election.

"We give them (Congressmen) ideas. We brief them on issues and Asia is one of the major sections" he said, adding that the foundation recently set up its office in Hong Kong to look into what was going on the Asian region.

"Its not easy to get the US to focus onn the region. One of the countries that interest and appeal to the US is Malaysia, which plays a key role in the development of this region," he said.

"We need to tell everybody (in the US) about Malaysia which will continue to grow. The partnership must be more balanced and certainly we see the future of Malaysia as heading to that direction.

"Its a tough job, it takes time, you need to get to understand the US and we have to understand you," he said.

Despite negative reports, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's frequent remarks against the US, Sheffer said the US was impressed with the way the relationship between Malaysia and the US was unfolding.

"In fact, he (Dr Mahathir) has done remarkably in the Malaysia-US relationship. Unlike other US embassies, the US embassy here is happy with the relationship with the Malaysian government," he said.

Asked on the US' liking to have a hand in other people's affairs,

Sheffer said: " I can't say how that role can ever end. There is a positive and negative way of sticking your nose in other people's affairs."

"We think that with consistent leadership, strategy and strong policy, intervention can be done in a positive way and with mutual acceptance." he said.

Sheffer said his "good words" about Malaysia were sincere and were uttered after taking into consideration this country's economic success.

"There are lots of things that we can cooperate in with Malaysia, which is the US' 11th largest trading partner. The US is the number one target of Malaysian manufacturing exports," he said.

Upon returning to the US, Sheffer said, he would immediately inform the foundation of his findings here and forward a report to the Congress, influential figures and significant journalists so that they had a better understanding of Malaysia.

He said the foundation would ensure that these parties got the message on Malaysia.

"We don't prepare long report papers. We take action on issues today and we make sure the results appear tomorrow," he added. -- BERNAMA

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