

05 SEP 1996

US-Bosnia

US PRAISES DR MAHATHIR FOR ALERTING WORLD ON BOSNIA ISSUE

By: Zulkefli Salleh and E Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 5 (Bernama) -- The United States has praised Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for playing a "very strong political role, telling the world on the need to counteract genocide in Bosnia".

"Dr Mahathir has been effective in alerting the world of the need to remedy the structural weakness of the Bosnians. The weakness had tempted the Serbs to take advantage of them," a senior US State Department official said today.

"The US responded to that and Malaysia was the first among Asean countries to come forward with offer to help. Malaysia is now cooperating once again completely with us and we appreciate that," Jon D.Glassman, the Deputy for Military Stabilization in the Balkans, European Affairs Bureau, US State Department told Bernama.

He said Malaysia had played a leading role in bringing peace to the Balkans and in the reconstruction of Bosnia-Croat Federation.

He also said the United States, which is coordinating a major programme to arm the Muslim-Croat Federation forces in Bosnia, will soon put to use Malaysia's US\$10 million (RM25 million) contribution and may seek more funds.

Glassman said the amount would be used to buy "some weapons and transportation services" under the Train and Equip Programme.

He said to-date a total of US\$140 million (RM350 million) had been pledged by several countries including the US, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates towards the programme with Malaysia being the fourth major contributor.

With US\$100 million (RM250 million) already deposited in the US Treasury, the contributions would be used to buy mainly artillery, anti-tank weapons, trucks, ammunition and engineering equipment for the Federation forces, he said.

Glassman, who earlier held talks with senior Wisma Putra officials, said the Federation, which controls 51 per cent of Bosnia-Herzegovina, has recently requested financial assistance to purchase the equipment.

"At this time, we have not asked for more contribution (from Malaysia). We have to look and see how the situation develops. If the Bosnian Serbs comply (with the Dayton peace accord), the programme will be adequate and if they don't we will have to review it," he said.

He said the US was providing a total of 46,100 M16 rifles, 1,000 M60 machine-guns, 45 M60A3 Main Battle tanks, 80 Armoured Personnel Carriers, 15 utility helicopters, 840 anti-tank weapons and ammunition.

A military training component is also included in the programme, whose total value is US\$100 million (RM250 million).

Asked how the military equipment would be distributed to the Muslim-Croat forces, Glassman said: "It will be on the basis of military need."

"Malaysia's cooperation has been very important because it has played a leadership role particularly in Asean on this," he said.

He said Malaysia was the first Asean country to come in with financial donation.

"We understand that Brunei will follow. The Sultan (of Brunei) has indicated that he will be making a major financial contribution," he said.

Asked what kind of military force would remain in Bosnia to sustain the

Dayton peace process when the Nato-led peace Implementation Force (Ifor) mandate runs out in December, Glassman said:

"It has not been discussed yet. Maybe after the Bosnian and US elections...A lot of countries have expressed concern including Malaysia. But we are not prepared to discuss that now."

Asked if the US would welcome Malaysia's participation should there be a new kind of military force after Ifor, he said it was premature to say it now.

"Malaysia's participation (in Ifor) is extremely valuable. It performed a very admirable job. We think Malaysia's participation has been extraordinary," he added. --BERNAMA

ES AAM