

Syed Hamid pleased with Powell meeting

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WASHINGTON: Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar met with US State Secretary Colin Powell here on Monday and came away visibly pleased with the "tone" and warm welcome shown to him.

He said these were indications that Malaysia and the United States were moving forward in their bilateral relations despite some differences.

The Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim issue cropped up but what struck him, Syed Hamid said, was that Anwar was not the "core element or centrepiece" in his discussions with Powell, former Defence Secretary William Cohen and some US senators.

"The centrepiece of our discussions was our bilateral relations and how we can move forward," he said.

It was the first high level meeting between the two countries in recent years after bilateral relations took a dip following the Anwar issue.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia

and the United States had very "deep" relations based on trade, investment, exchange of intelligence, police co-operation and drug enforcement.

"We want to move forward in our relations with the US to cover not only trade and investment but also the political side.

"I am very happy . . . this has been a very successful visit," said Syed Hamid, who arrived here four days ago to 'touch base' with Powell who would be attending next week's Asean Regional Forum in Hanoi.

Syed Hamid, who met Powell for the first time, said the Bush administration was "more forward looking" and there was a difference in its approach which set it apart from the Clinton administration.

"My emphasis has always been to be engaged (with the US) notwithstanding our differences. We look at this administration as one that is willing to be engaged.

"We may have our differences in the way that we handle certain specific matters

but that should not stop us from continuing to have bilateral relations and dialogue with each other."

Syed Hamid said there would always be some issues in which the United States and Malaysia would see things differently.

On Powell's participation in the ARF, Syed Hamid said: "We are very encouraged at the interest shown in Asean by the US."

A State Department confirmed that discussions between Syed Hamid and Powell centred on regional issues of interest to both countries and that the Anwar issue was raised in passing.

The United States, however, expressed its concern on the human rights situation in Malaysia, he said.

Syed Hamid, who had also visited Mali, Morocco, Libya, Poland and Russia, said he also discussed regional and international development, as well as preparations for the September visit to Russia by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.