

Malaysia still business-friendly

SUN 19 NOV 2001

It's a pragmatic Muslim nation, says US trade leader

By Toh An Nee

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun: American businessmen still see this country as having a business-friendly environment.

"I think the American business sees Malaysia as the most pragmatic of the Muslim nations," American Chamber of Commerce president Nicholas Zeffreys told *The Sun*.

Ho said although this is still the general view of the American business community, "you have to be careful that this view is not affected or destroyed".

However, Zeffreys said, he is optimistic because "the Malaysian view is forward rather than backward-looking".

Various quarters in the country have made harsh criticisms against the United States for bombing Afghanistan following the Sept 11 terrorist attacks.

The government has made clear that while it condemns the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, it does not condone the killing of innocent Afghan civilians as a result of the bombing.

Zeffreys, who attended the two-day conference on terrorism which ended yesterday, said he sensed hostility in the minds of certain people in Malaysia.

However, he believes there is no such hostility in most Malaysians.

"I think good people, and Malaysians are good people, will focus on what it takes to build a better

world for the future," he said.

Zeffreys also said he is impressed by the level of government-to-government dialogues.

"When the new US administration came in, it wiped the slates clean. It said we need to have more dialogues and there has been communication between (Prime Minister Datuk Seri) Dr Mahathir (Mohamad) and (US President) George Bush.

"That was such a relief for the American community, because when you have dialogues, it is difficult to become enemies."

On the conference, he said it was good as it provided the beginning of greater understanding and closure of gaps resulting from cultural differences.

"It is best to air the views rather than have them seethe and boil inside. Conversations and dialogues are enhanced by conferences like this," he said.

Zeffreys said it is impossible to define terrorism, and that there is a need to instead "focus on the qualities of life and humankind that we want to have going for the future".

"In conflict, there is a tendency to lose sight of where we want to go. I think where we want to go is to have more conversations between countries, more dialogues, and more understanding."

At present, he said, there is a relative absence of that understanding because of the many cultural differences.