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Give us the facts, US told (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - While reiterating its anti-terrorism stand, Malaysia today asked the United States to furnish facts and information it has on terrorist activities in the country.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Malaysia was ready to give full co-operation to efforts against terrorism and all it asked for were facts and information to respond accordingly.

Bernama quoted Abdullah, who is also the Home Minister, as saying this in a brief statement in response to US Secretary of State Colin Powell's remarks in Washington that the Al-Qa'eda network had been bolstering Islamic insurgencies in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Labelling Southeast Asia as a major operational hub for Muslim extremists, Powell, however, ruled out military action against the terrorist infrastructure in these countries in the near future.

The following is Abdullah's statement in full: "I have read US Secretary of State Colin Powell's statement. All that we ask from them is to give us the facts and information. I have stated earlier Malaysia is always against terrorism and we are ready to co-operate fully in this matter."

Meanwhile, the US embassy here said that it greatly appreciated the Malaysian Government's support and strong stand against international terrorism.

"In regard to the terrorism threat, we remain in close touch with the Malaysian Government and are continuing to work together to support security in the Asean region," the embassy said in a statement.

The embassy was clarifying an article by Tim Weiner in the New York Times yesterday and carried in the International Herald Tribune today that terrorists tied to the Al-Qa'eda network and based in Southeast Asia may be targets of future US actions against the global threat of terrorism.

The embassy said the article quoting unnamed sources had drawn considerable attention in Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia and also in the US.

The embassy said the Asean nations, along with many others, have recognised the threat the global terror network posed to civilisation and were moving to address it.

"We will support their efforts in any way we can," the embassy said.

The embassy also reproduced US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher's statement on Oct 10 that reads: "The United States of America is working very well with the governments in the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere to combat terrorism.

"It is important to remember that the international campaign against terrorists includes efforts in many areas: economic, political, diplomatic, financial, law enforcement, information and intelligence sharing, not just a military component.

"One should not assume from any particular indication of interest on our part of working with somebody or working against terrorists groups that the next step is automatically military action."

Earlier today, Abdullah also spoke to reporters at Parliament lobby on the issue.

He said Malaysia's stand on terrorism was clearly stated not only in the media but also during the recent telephone conversation between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and US President George W. Bush.

He said the stand was clear and there was no necessity to repeat it to

the United States.

Malaysia's co-operation in this matter to date had been clear and the new US Ambassador to Malaysia had thanked the Government for this, Abdullah said.

In Johor Baru, Director of Internal Security and Public Order Datuk Hamid Mustapha said police have yet to establish any organised local jihad movement that was systematically helping the Taliban Government of Afghanistan in its war against the United States.

He said apart from the recent call by Pas, which gave its members the green light to fight with the Taliban forces, there was no indication of a groundswell of support for the cause locally.

Asked about the recent spate of arrests of members of the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM), Hamid said most of those arrested were individuals who had been influenced as students to join the movement.

"We are fortunate to have traced and exposed this group and the people connected to the movement early, well before they could really take root," he said.

Asked about the safety of Americans and other Westerners living and working in Malaysia, Hamid said police have held extensive meetings with the foreign envoys of several countries.

"We have taken proactive steps to ensure the safety and security of these foreigners and we have assigned personnel to ensure the security of their embassies and the factories owned by them," he said.

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