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Syed Hamid-Powell

SYED HAMID MEETS POWELL IN A FRIENDLY SETTING

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Bernama) -- Visiting Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar met his American counterpart Collin Powell in a "warm and friendly setting" during a maiden meeting at the State Department here Monday.

Syed Hamid characterised his meeting with the Secretary of State as "productive and successful" as the two discussed bilateral and regional issues.

The minister said he wanted to "get acquainted" with Powell in advance of the Asean Ministerial Meeting and the Asean Regional Forum in Hanoi next week.

A State Department spokesman said Powell and Syed Hamid had general discussions of regional interests in advance of the Hanoi meeting.

"The secretary welcomes prime minister (Datuk Seri Dr) Mahathir's interest in better bilateral ties. However, the US remains concerned about the human rights situation in Malaysia," the spokesman said.

When asked at a press conference later whether their talks centred on former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Syed Hamid said Anwar was mentioned but was not the main focus of discussion.

Syed Hamid said that he was happy that the Bush administration was more "open and forward-looking" in its approach to foreign policy.

While here Syed Hamid also held a series of meetings with US senators, a senior National Security Adviser, non-governmental groups and Malaysian students.

He also had a one-hour lunch with former defence secretary William Cohen where they had wide-ranging discussions on US-Malaysia issues.

Cohen, who is said to be a close friend of Anwar, was very vocal about Anwar's arrest when he served as defence secretary under the Clinton administration.

Syed Hamid was in Mali to attend an Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting before proceeding to Morocco, Libya, Russia and Poland to promote Malaysia's palm oil and Proton cars.

According to Syed Hamid, the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been invited to visit Russia in September.

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