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US keen to learn ways to deal with terrorists

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - United States Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick called on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today and conveyed to him President George W. Bush's appreciation of a letter sent to him last week by the Prime Minister on his counter-terrorism proposals.

Bernama reports that he stated the President was keen to meet Dr Mahathir to further discuss the issue at the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) forum in Shanghai over the weekend.

Zoellick, a member of Bush's Cabinet with the rank of Ambassador and who serves as the President's principal trade policy adviser and chief trade negotiator, also stated the US was interested to learn from Malaysia ways to deal with terrorists as the country had countered similar problems with the communists three decades ago.

A Wisma Putra official, who was present at the one-hour meeting at the Prime Minister's office here, said the US also appreciated the messages of condolence sent by Malaysia and Dr Mahathir for those who perished when two planes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on Sept 11, killing more than 5,000 people.

At the meeting, the Prime Minister reiterated Malaysia's stand against terrorism.

"Dr Mahathir also told the US Trade Representative the fight against terrorism should be in unison with the international community and that the root cause to this menace should be tackled first," the official said.

The Prime Minister also explained that these unacceptable acts of terror by certain groups were mainly perpetrated by people who were misguided.

Dr Mahathir also reiterated that US air strikes on Afghanistan would not solve the problem pertaining to terrorism, but in fact would complicate it further, the Foreign Ministry official said.

He added Dr Mahathir also wanted the US to find a way to settle the problem in Palestine as this was an issue which contributed to the terrorist situation worldwide.

"However, the Prime Minister also told him he hoped this criticism would not be construed as a sign that Malaysia is anti-American," the official said.

He added that Zoellick expressed US' acknowledgement that Malaysia was not anti-American and "in fact acknowledged that Malaysians are among the warmest and most friendliest people in the world".

The official said the US viewed Malaysia as a model for developing countries in terms of progress, development and religious tolerance.

The discussion also focused on economic matters, mainly the World Trade Organisation's new round of talks.

Dr Mahathir reiterated there needed to be an agenda for the talks before it begins.

"They also agreed that many economies are suffering because of the attacks and something must be done to stimulate growth, but the Prime Minister said Malaysia is already taking this up and can weather the present economic climate," he said.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar today officially conveyed to Zoellick Malaysia's concern over the attacks on Afghanistan which had caused the civilian deaths.

Speaking at a Press conference, Syed Hamid said he told Zoellick the attacks might cause other Islamic countries to react.

"We are also concerned about the wrong image of Islam following the Sept 11 attacks which killed 5,000 to 6,000 people, including about 500 Muslims," he said.

He said Zoellick had told him Bush did not want the war to be seen as one between Islam and the West, but one against terrorism.

He said they also discussed security and economic issues and the stability of the region following the Sept 11 tragedy.

Asked about attempts by certain quarters to strain ties between Malaysia and the US, he said the campaign against terrorism should not affect the stability of moderate Muslim nations.

Syed Hamid said peaceful demonstrations against the attacks on Afghanistan should not be seen as pro-Taliban or anti-America.

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