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Hamid-Sex

US HUMAN TRAFFICKING REPORT UNTRUE, SAYS SYED HAMID

WASHINGTON, July 17 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar has described as untrue a US government report on illegal trafficking of women and children for forced labour and sex in Malaysia, which lists the country as among those doing the least to combat the problem.

Syed Hamid, who met with his counterpart, Colin Powell, for the first time at the State Department here, said his foreign policy approach was not guided by reports issued by foreign governments, but by a more long-term view.

He said the two countries had differences, but fundamentally their political, military and economic ties were strong.

He said Powell was "open and warm" at Monday's meeting and appeared to be "forward-looking" in his foreign policy approach.

The two men discussed bilateral and regional issues and "got acquainted" in advance of the Asean Ministerial Meeting and the Asean Regional Forum in Hanoi, next week.

US-Malaysia relations took a nose-dive under the Clinton administration following the arrest of former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Hamid said there was mention of Anwar in his discussions with Powell but the discussions did not centre on Anwar.

A State Department spokesman said: "The US welcomes Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's) interest in better ties. However, the US remains concerned about the human rights situation."

The 2001 Trafficking in Persons report, issued by the State Department with input from non-governmental organisations (NGO's), is mandated by the US Congress under the Victims of Trafficking and Violence and Protection Act of the year 2000.

The US estimates that at least 700,000 people become victims of trafficking every year, mostly women and children, forced to labour in sweatshops, construction sites or sex industries.

The State Department placed countries in 3 Tiers: Tier 1, countries that comply fully with the standards laid out in the Act; Tier 2, countries that don't fully comply but are making significant efforts to comply; and Tier 3, those that don't comply and are not making significant efforts to do so.

Malaysia falls under Tier 3 along with Israel, Bahrain, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burma, Indonesia, Greece, Gabon, Albania, Kazakhstan, Turkey, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, Yugoslavia and Congo.

Countries that do not comply risk US sanctions from 2003.

The report claims that Malaysia is both a source and destination country for trafficked persons. Young women from primarily Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines are trafficked into Malaysia for exploitation, it says.

Small numbers of Malaysian women, primarily ethnic Chinese, are trafficked to Japan, Canada, the United States and Taiwan for sexual exploitation, the report claims.

-- BERNAMA

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