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Mahathir-Caucus

DR MAHATHIR LAUNCHES MALAYSIA-AMERICA FRIENDSHIP CAUCUS

By: Jaafar Hussin and E.Sivabalan

WASHINGTON, May 14 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when launching the Malaysia-America Friendship Caucus at Capitol Hill Tuesday, said the United States can once again be the universal friend of the world by being more gentle towards recalcitrant nations and people.

"I would be lying if I say that the world still sees the United States of America as the friend that they knew.

"Yet, there is every reason and every possibility for the United States and the Americans to be once again the universal friend of the world," the prime minister told a closed-door luncheon at the launch of the caucus, also known as the Malaysia Trade, Security and Economic Cooperation Caucus.

The text of his speech was distributed to the Malaysian media here by the Prime Minister's Office.

The luncheon, held at the Speaker's Dining Room of the Capitol, was attended by members of the US Congress. The caucus made up of US Congressmen, is aimed at disseminating accurate information about Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a three-day visit to the United States since Monday, said people tend to respond more positively to the friendly approach than to confrontation.

"Pushed into a corner, even the weakest will fight. Victory over them will really not mean much," he said.

The prime minister said the US and the Americans were the most liked people not so long ago.

"In Malaysia, we were grateful to America because we were liberated from Japanese occupation by Americans largely. Americans were our heroes and our friends," he said.

He said America and the American people were the best friends of all the oppressed people of the world.

Dr Mahathir said that in the confrontation between the Communist bloc and the Western bloc, few had any difficulty in choosing America and the West.

"When the confrontation ended with the defeat of the Communist bloc, the world saw a period of world peace and unprecedented prosperity. The world even welcomed the role of the United States as the policeman, the law keeper of the world," he said.

Describing the West as impatient, he said they wanted an overnight change. "Sudden change, even if it is for the good, is disruptive," he said, citing the case of Myanmar where the ruling party was now less resistant towards a switch to democracy after they were persuaded by a Malaysian upon the request of the United Nations.

The Malaysian the prime minister was referring to was former UN president and current UN special envoy to Myanmar Tan Sri Razali Ismail.

Dr Mahathir said it was well to remember that democracy was only a means and not an end in itself. "It is the good life that democracy brings that counts, not democracy per se."

Dr Mahathir, who is well-known for speaking his mind, said Malaysians understood Americans' anxiety to see that the freedom that they enjoyed should be enjoyed also by Malaysians and other people.

"But we must admit that at the moment, we are unable to accept the absolute freedom that you believe in.

"There are certain freedoms that you enjoy which we think we can do without. We hope you can tolerate our different sense of values. One day

perhaps we will be comfortable with your values.

"But for the moment, we are not comfortable. Let us celebrate the difference for that is what makes the world interesting," Dr Mahathir said.

He said that if Malaysians and Americans could accept that there would always be differences between them, in culture, values and opinions, then they would be more tolerant of each other.

The prime minister said the US today could afford to use its power and strength. "But it would do you no harm to be friendly to other countries, to be patient with them and to win them over to your side," he added.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir also spoke about combating international terrorism and how, in fighting against terrorists, the world must agree to act together and to play their part.

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