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Huhtala-Bali

SUGGESTIONS OF US INVOLVEMENT IN BALI BOMBING OUTRAGEOUS

By: Muin Abdul Majid

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- The United States Ambassador to Malaysia Marie Huhtala has described as outrageous suggestions that her country might have had a hand in the Oct 12 deadly bombing in Bali.

"That is just outrageous. I get very angry when I hear that. To even suggest that our government has anything to do with an act of terror is crazy, particularly since we have been the victims of the worst act of terror so far in the world," she said, alluding to the Sept 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the US.

Among those who suggested possible American involvement in the bombing of a nightclub on the Indonesian resort island, which killed nearly 200 young people, mostly tourists, were several newspapers and Indonesian Parliamentarians.

They claimed that it was carried out to enable foreigners to gain a foothold in the running of Indonesia.

In an interview with Bernama, the ambassador said that Washington would do everything it could to work with governments around the world to stop the scourge of terrorism.

Huhtala also outrightly dismissed suspicions that the Bali car-bomb blast was engineered as a pretext to strengthen US position in this region.

"We do not need to use that kind of a pretext. We have good relations in this region. We are not looking to assert force in Southeast Asia, that's very far from our objectives," she said.

Huhtala said the US cooperated with each one of the countries in a slightly different way because the relationships involved were slightly different.

"In the case of the Philippines, for instance, we have a military alliance as they asked us to send in our troops to do training."

"Other countries don't want military help, and that's fine with us. Maybe they would like intelligence cooperation, law enforcement cooperation. So we are very flexible about how we engage the countries in this region," she said.

Describing the Bali tragedy as a wake-up call for all the countries in Southeast Asia, the ambassador said it showed that no one was safe from possible terrorist attacks.

Huhtala said she was heartened to see that the Indonesian Government made a very strong statement deploring the nightclub bombing on an island that had been previously described as a paradise for foreign travellers.

"They recognised that they have a problem in their country. Each country in Asean is approaching this issue (of terrorism) in a different way, and that makes sense because the situation is different in each country."

"And we have no problem with that. We want to be helpful with each country in whatever way is most appropriate to their circumstances. And that's how we have been approaching it," she said.

In this connection, she urged all countries in Southeast Asia to continue to work closely with the US to combat terrorism which "we now see can happen anywhere, in any country, even in places that have no political significance."

On reports that the Taiwan Government was informed by the US about the imminent attack on Bali one day before it happened, Huhtala said this was not quite the case.

She said the US government late last week issued an updated warning which talked about the possibility of terrorists turning to "soft" targets such as clubs, restaurants, schools and places of worship.

Huhtala said this had been passed to all governments and in fact, she personally went to Wisma Putra last Friday to pass the new alert to the Malaysian Government.

"So not only the government in Taipei but every government in the region got that warning last week, including the government of Indonesia," she said.

"Of course no one could foresee the attack in Bali. No one warned about it because no one knew about it."

The US Ambassador was also asked for her comments on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's remarks on the need to study the root causes of terrorism in order to wipe out the menace.

Huhtala said the US did not dispute that at all, what with a lot of discussions and thought being given to what were the so-called root causes of terrorism.

However, she drove home the point that no matter what the root cause might be -- whether unhappiness with a certain policy, poverty, oppression or others -- none of it ever justified murdering innocent people."

"We had nearly 200 young people murdered on Saturday night in cold blood. And I am sorry (to say) that there is no root cause out there that justifies that."

"And I think studying the root causes can only get you so far. I think you have to put a lot of attention on simply stopping these criminal acts, and that is the position of my government as well."

-- BERNAMA

MAM AHH AAM