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Malaysia-US

M'SIA-US RELATIONS BUILT ON TRUTH NOT FALSE HOPES, SAYS US CONGRESSMAN

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, Sept 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia-US relations are built on the truth not false hopes, said an American congressman here Tuesday.

Congressman Gregory Meeks (Democrat-New York), co-chair of the Malaysia-America Trade and Economic Cooperation Caucus on Capitol Hill, who described relations between the two countries as "excellent", was heartened by the Malaysian leadership for speaking out and speaking the truth, thus making communications easier and better understood between the two countries.

The caucus, launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Datuk Dr Mahathir Mohamad on his last visit to Washington, is a group of like-minded congressmen who work to make Malaysia known and understood in Congress, and to anticipate and act on any problems pertaining to US-Malaysia relations.

Earlier, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi met with members of the caucus as well as Majority leader Dick Armey and Majority whip Tim DeLay. Abdullah also met with Vice President Richard Cheney at his office.

Peter Sessions (Republican-New York), the other co-chair of the caucus, said that Abdullah represented a new confidence of Malaysia. "His new role as prime minister, when that occurs," is important in making Malaysia a powerful force not only in its relations with America but also in the region and the world, he said.

On the delays in obtaining student visas for Malaysian students entering the US, Meeks assured Malaysians that "things would get better" once the new rules and regulations were in place.

Coming from New York, where almost 3,000 people were killed in the World Trade Centre buildings on Sept 11, Meeks said that the tragic event showed how vulnerable America was to terrorist attacks and the American government was doing everything it could to avoid future catastrophes.

Sessions said that American universities and tourist spots have also suffered from the new restrictions on visas. "The United States is on high alert, home security is not in place -- we're concerned, but we recognise the need to put in place new rules and regulations" to avoid another tragedy involving terrorist acts.

When asked if Abdullah's explanation about Islam had helped them understand the religion and Muslims better, Meeks said that America has faith in Islam and Muslims and "we will not let them (terrorists) use Islam to hide."

Adding that his chief of staff is Muslim, Meeks stressed that "America is not after Muslims. There are evil people who are Muslims, Buddhists or Christians -- we don't condemn the entire faith because of this (Sept 11)."

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