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Mahathir-Ties

M'SIA-US TIES GETTING STRONGER, SAYS PM

By: Jaafar Hussin and E.Sivabalan

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Bernama) -- Malaysia can expect more positive ties with the United States following a change in attitude of the Bush administration now, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The prime minister said that it could clearly be seen that Washington was now giving greater attention and placing high hopes on Malaysia.

The change in attitude was very obvious, compared with the situation during the Reagan and Clinton administration.

"If previously Malaysia was regarded as insignificant, now it look like we are being given greater attention and at the same time they are placing high hopes on Malaysia," he said.

He said this when briefing Malaysian journalists on the outcome of his discussions with President George W. Bush and top US officials including Vice President Dick Cheney, congressmen and senators here Tuesday.

Dr Mahathir said that following the change in attitude, both countries could expect better ties in future.

According to the prime minister, his discussions with the US top officials, covering various issues, had enabled him to explain to them Malaysia's prescriptions pertaining to such issues.

He said that during his discussions with Cheney and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, he had explained in detail issues he had discussed with Bush earlier.

They appeared to be appreciative of Malaysia's stand even though there was a difference of opinion over some issues.

Dr Mahathir said that he also expressed his appreciation over Washington's stand on the establishment of a Palestinian state.

He said that he had expressed the need for boundaries and settlements to be determined for both conflicting parties.

Apart from that, Dr Mahathir said that he had also stated that there would certainly exist within two conflicting parties, people who wish to derail the peace process for personal reasons or to project themselves as a champion.

Touching on currency trading, Dr Mahathir, who is also finance minister, said that he had stressed on the need for a restructuring of the existing financial architecture as a result of what had happened to the currencies of Malaysia and other countries.

He said that even though they had not come straight out with it, based on the discussions, it was obvious that the top US officials also agreed to the need for such restructuring.

On developments in Myanmar, the prime minister said that all parties should exercise restraint and not be too impatient to see drastic changes in that country.

He said: "Even though changes have occurred, we should deal with them with caution as hasty actions will be counter-productive."

Asked on his discussions with Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan Wednesday, the prime minister said that he had been told that Greenspan was interested to know more about Islamic funding and the possibility of the issuance of Islamic bonds.

Dr Mahathir said that in a recent meeting with Greenspan, Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz had explained to him Malaysia's achievements in the financial sector including its success in coming up with various financial services with the adoption of Syariah elements.

Earlier, the prime minister received overwhelming response when he spoke at the US-Asean Business Council dinner here Tuesday attended mostly by US corporate figures and entrepreneurs.

They praised his speech which they described as visionary, concise and effective.

Bush, in his special message read out by the council's president, Ernie Bower, applauded those in attendance who were working to promote the US-Malaysia economic partnership.

Bush said that this important relationship greatly benefits both countries and points the way to a brighter and a more prosperous future.

He said that as a modern, moderate and prosperous Muslim state, Malaysia was an important example to the region and the rest of the world.

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