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Powell-Visit

POWELL ON "LISTENING MODE" IN ASEAN TRIP

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Bernama) -- United States Secretary of State Colin Powell plans to be on a "listening mode" when he makes his first trip to Malaysia and other countries in the region to assess regional security and efforts to combat terrorism.

Powell, who will make his stop in Kuala Lumpur on Monday, said: "I'm anxious to exchange views on the situation in the region, our campaign against terrorism, and what opportunities might exist for more trade and investment in Malaysia."

"This is my first opportunity as secretary of state to visit Malaysia and I'm looking forward to it. It's a very important country that occupies a strategic position," said the former joint chief of staff under the senior Bush's administration.

"I will also be in a listening mode. I find it useful when I go out on these trips to bring a message of friendship, a message of support.

"Where there are differences -- discuss those differences, but then listen so that I can hear the views of the people I am visiting with and bring those views back to Washington and convey to the president, members of Congress and the American public," he told five Asian journalists, including Bernama, in a roundtable interview at the State Department.

Powell will depart for an eight-day whirlwind tour beginning Saturday to India, Pakistan, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Bandar Seri Begawan (to attend the Asean Regional Forum), and then on to Jakarta and Manila.

The 10-member Asean nations are expected to adopt the proposed anti-terror declaration at the ARF in Brunei.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said in Kuala Lumpur that the content of the Asean declaration would be similar to the one signed by KL and Washington when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was here as guest of President George W. Bush in May.

In that pact, KL agreed to cooperate with Washington on sharing financial information and immigration control.

Powell said that the campaign against terrorism had given a focus to the meetings at the ARF that might not have existed before.

On Indonesia, Powell said: "The country must deal with terrorism through a combination of legal means -- going after illegal organizations and going after illegal financing -- they need to improve their intelligence capability, they need to improve their law enforcement capability and they need a commitment to go after terrorists."

On the Indonesian military, the former general said that for a military organization to have the support of its people, it has to show that it is defending the state, it is defending its people -- doing it in a way that is protective of human rights and human dignity.

"And we've had these discussions with all our friends around the world, including Indonesians. With respect to our military-to-military relations with Indonesia, we're reviewing all those programmes now. We may have something to say in Brunei," he said.

Meanwhile, momentum is building up in the US Congress to reinstate military training programmes for Indonesia, banned following charges of massacres by the Indonesian military in East Timor, drug trafficking and corruption.

On Aceh, Powell said that the US always encouraged reconciliation in finding a peaceful political solution to the problem. "When a nation

believes that it is necessary to use military force -- we would always encourage that it be done consistent with the rules of that nation's laws, consistent with internationally-accepted standards."

"I'm anxious to visit and hear the views of the Indonesian leaders as to the situation they face in Aceh and elsewhere and come back with a better understanding, " he said.

On a lighter note, when asked about reports that he plans to resign to run for political office, Powell said: "I have no political plans, no plans to run-- haven't for seven years.

"For some reason, the press feels it is necessary every two weeks to write a story about whether I'm up or whether I'm down, whether I'm in or whether I'm out, and whether I'm going to resign or whether I'm going to stay forever. But I have no plans to resign and I wonder why they continue to write the story every two weeks."

-- BERNAMA

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