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US-Malaysia

US IMPRESSED WITH MALAYSIA'S RESOLVE TO FIGHT TERRORISM

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, May 3 (Bernama) -- The Bush administration seems impressed with Malaysia's resolve to fight terrorism.

United States Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, after a private meeting with his Malaysian counterpart, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, said at the Pentagon Thursday: "It is impressive...the extent to which Malaysia is a cooperating partner in the global war on terrorism."

Najib, at the news conference, responded: "Our military ties are at an all-time high today," and that Malaysia was happy to cooperate with the US and other allies on the war on terror.

Privately, Rumsfeld told Najib that the government of Muslim countries should be allowed to initiate their own approach in fighting terrorism and militancy because only they understood the political, economic and religious problems of their own countries.

Malaysia has been aggressive in containing extremism in the country and has arrested 62 militants, with "more currently hunted down," Najib said.

The two, who met for the first time, quickly built a rapport after a 40-minute closed-door meeting. Najib invited Rumsfeld to Malaysia and the latter accepted his invitation. Rumsfeld said he planned to visit Malaysia "later this year."

Najib was received by Rumsfeld on arrival where they walked through an "honour cordon" of 19 men.

Najib, who is here for a four-day visit, is accompanied by Armed Forces Chief of Staff Lt Jen Datuk Mohamed Sharom Nordin, Director General of the Defence Intelligence of Malaysia Maj Gen Datuk Wan Abu Bakar Omar and Deputy Secretary-General of the Defence Ministry Siti Azizah Abod.

The minister later told the Malaysian media that he had an excellent meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld. "He's taken note of the special measures we've taken against terrorism as well as the cooperation we've extended regionally and globally. He believes that we're on top of the situation."

Najib, in his 45-minute meeting with National Security Advisor Dr Condoleezza Rice, also discussed terrorism, the West Asian crisis and the upcoming visit of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to the White House.

The prime minister will make his first official visit to Washington from May 13-15 since President George W. Bush came to power in January last year. The two met in the Apec leader's summit in Shanghai last November.

"Rice reaffirmed that the administration is looking forward to the PM's visit and forging a much deeper and warmer political ties."

Najib said that Rice noted the prime minister's speech at the Organisation of Islamic Conference meeting in Kuala Lumpur and his definition of terrorism which "was well-received here."

He said that Rice regarded Malaysia as a "friend in the war on terrorism, especially the prime minister's role."

Najib also took the opportunity to meet US Congressmen on Capitol Hill Wednesday and Thursday, including Senator John McCain, Senator Chuck Hagel in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Rep Saxby Chambliss, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Terrorism and Homeland Security; and Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee.

"We're building our relationship with Capitol Hill and explaining the situation in Malaysia," said Najib, who described the reception on the Hill as "supportive and a lot more positive towards Malaysia."

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