

30 JUL 2002

Syed Hamid-Powell

US PROPOSES REGIONAL ANTI-TERRORISM CENTRE IN MALAYSIA

PUTRAJAYA, July 30 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and the United States are looking into the possibility of setting up a regional centre to coordinate anti-terrorism activities.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the proposal was mooted by US Secretary of State Colin Powell during their meeting at Wisma Putra, here, today.

"They (US) asked about the possibility of working closer to make Malaysia a regional centre for activities to counter terrorism...to have some institute-like (body) which becomes a place for discussion and deliberation," he told reporters after the meeting.

He said the proposed centre would be jointly manned by Malaysian and US officials.

Earlier, at a brief joint news conference with Powell, Syed Hamid said that both countries would be looking into specific areas of cooperation to enhance efforts to combat terrorism.

"We have worked effectively and strongly, we are very happy with that relationship and now we are looking into specific areas of working together.

"We are looking forward to having something substantive between the US and Malaysia where we can cover the region's forum of discussions for exchange of views." he said.

Asked by a US reporter regarding the extradition of Malaysian suspects in the Sept 11 attacks on the US, Syed Hamid said the US could use the normal channel set up between the two countries for that purpose.

Powell, who arrived here last night for a brief visit, earlier called on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Meanwhile, Powell, when asked on human rights for Malaysian suspects detained for terrorism activities, said they must be treated consistent with the universal standard of human rights.

Syed Hamid, in reply to this question, said: "Malaysia places a lot of importance on human rights and has so far been exercising the universal standard of human rights and the same time looking at the national interest from the national perspective."

He reiterated that the Internal Security Act (ISA) was only used to preserve peace and stability in the country and not for political purposes.

Asked whether the West Asian issue was brought up in the discussions, Powell reiterated that the US would seek a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Syed Hamid described the meeting as very constructive and fruitful.

Powell, who is on an eight-day tour of Asia, is scheduled to depart for Singapore later today before proceeding to Brunei to attend the Asean Regional Forum

-- BERNAMA

AZH MHI NM MFJ JK