

US seeks RM4.6m to fight terror in Malaysia

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WASHINGTON: The Bush administration is seeking US\$1.2 million (RM4.6 million) in military training for Malaysia from the US Congress for fiscal year 2004.

A US government official told Bernama here on Tuesday that the amount requested by President George W. Bush from the new 108th congress was an impressive increase from the US\$800,000 (RM3 million) approved in the previous fiscal year, emphasising the president's commitment to win the war against global terrorism.

However, Kuala Lumpur has yet to receive the amount for 2003 IMET (International Military and Education Training) as the previous Congress did not pass all the appropriations bill, the official said.

The new Congress is continuing the work of its predecessor and is considering an omnibus bill that will fund all government agencies for 2003.

The president's 2004 foreign assis-

tance/foreign affairs budget, which begins on Oct 1 this year for all agencies, amounts to US\$28.5 billion (RM108 billion).

The US official who declined to be identified, said that no financial support has been sought for the regional counter-terrorism centre proposed to be set up in Kuala Lumpur.

"However, we are looking at ways in which we can be more supportive," he said.

This might include the sharing of information, he said.

James L. Schoff, a programme officer at the United States-Japan Centre in New York, told Bernama in a telephone interview congressional support for the centre would be difficult if the US did not have much say in its running.

US funding for the proposed centre could mean congressional scrutiny of how the centre is managed, demand for US authority in managing the cen-

tre, and an annual report on the progress in fighting terrorism in the region, he said.

In his paper on the "108th Congress Asia Pacific Policy Outlook," Schoff writes: "The proposed establishment of a regional counter-terrorism centre in Kuala Lumpur, for example, will be a difficult issue for Congress to support, if asked."

"Still, the US has an emerging partner in Malaysia in this conflict if the planned leadership transition later this year goes smoothly.

"Any successor to Mahathir will have less political capital to spend on closer relations with the US should tensions emerge," he said.

On the possible "tensions", Schoff said that if the US invaded Iraq, relations with Malaysia could become complicated.

However, it would be manageable if Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in power, he said.