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Senate-Counter-productive

CUTTING OFF MILITARY AID TO MALAYSIA IS COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE, SAYS ANALYST

By: Salmu Hashim

WASHINGTON, Nov 1 (Bernama) -- The United States Senate's proposal to cut off all military aid to Malaysia goes too far in its efforts to punish Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his recent speech concerning the Jews, an Asian analyst said.

Dana Dillon, said here Friday that the proposal would condemn the Southeast Asian nation, not Dr Mahathir, its former prime minister.

"The amendment against Malaysia will take effect after Dr Mahathir has retired and left office ... Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad) Badawi will inherit a crisis on military cooperation with the United States that may consume his first few weeks in office and sour a new U.S.-Malaysian post-Mahathir relationship," said Dillon, an analyst at the Heritage Foundation, a Washington think tank.

"It is the prerogative of the U.S. Congress to address international injustice, but restricting military assistance to Malaysia based on the racist remarks of a retiring prime minister is counter-productive and counter-intuitive to U.S.-Malaysian relationship and the war on terrorism," he added.

"There are many adjectives to describe Mahathir's speech, including disgraceful. Nevertheless, despite Mahathir's excesses, Malaysia has been a model friend to the U.S. in Southeast Asia and the Congress must bear in mind the future of U.S.-Malaysian relations," said the analyst.

Dr Mahathir's remark at the opening of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit in Putrajaya last month that "Jews rule this world by proxy" had drawn strong criticisms from the West including the U.S. and Europe. He stepped down as Malaysia's fourth prime minister Friday.

The McConnell amendment proposed to the 2004 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill cuts off military assistance for Malaysia. But aid can be made available if the Secretary of State determines and reports to Congress that Malaysia supports and promotes religious freedoms, including tolerance for people of the Jewish faith.

Noting that the amendment was a curious requirement for a country proud of its diversity, Dillon said the Malaysian constitution guaranteed freedom of religion and Malaysians of all faiths practised their religion almost without restriction.

According to the State Department's annual report on religious freedom, religious minorities in Malaysia practise their religion freely.

In many ways Malaysia, was a moderate, progressive and secular Muslim state, he added.

Dillon stressed that "this amendment is also counter-productive to the war on terrorism. Malaysia has been a valiant and valuable ally in Southeast Asia."

"Malaysia hosts 15-20 U. S. navy ship visits a year, permits more than a thousand U.S. military over flights annually and, since 9-11, the Malaysian police have arrested 70 members of the Al Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist group.

"Kuala Lumpur plays a key role in regional efforts to combat terrorism including joint operations with Thailand, the Philippines and Australia.

"Malaysia has strong law enforcement and intelligence cooperation against terrorists and is host to a regional counter-terrorism training centre," he said.

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