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M'sia-US

NO INTENTION TO TAKE OVER M'SIA'S ROLE IN PEACE PROCESS, SAYS US

KUALA LUMPUR, June 4 (Bernama) -- The United States has no intention to take over Malaysia's role in the peace process in southern Philippines, US ambassador to Malaysia Marie Huhtala said today.

Replying to a question on the matter, Huhtala said that Washington still see Kuala Lumpur as taking the lead in the matter.

In this context, she said, the US would never ever want to do anything that would offend Malaysia.

"Because Malaysia has played a very helpful role as a formal broker for peace agreement in the southern Philippines...we are not proposing to do that ourselves," Huhtala said after attending a talk on "Reading of a Multicultural America" at the National Library here.

"We still see Malaysia as taking the lead but if there are ways we can be helpful in a sort of unofficial way, we will be interested in doing that," said Huhtala.

Two days ago, a Bernama story from Manila quoted an Opposition senator as saying that the US was keen in troubleshooting the stalled peace process in southern Philippines saying however that there was a hitch as Malaysia was already deep in it and if Washington were to enter the picture, it might offend the Philippines' close Asean neighbour.

Malaysia has hosted several talks between Manila and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) over the past years which led to the signing of a ceasefire pact.

The truce, however, collapsed following renewed hostilities between the military and the MILF even as Kuala Lumpur sought another round of peace dialogue last month.

On a different subject, Huhtala said that her comments on Malaysia-US bilateral ties last week had been taken out of context.

"I never said our relations were at the lowest point. I think my comments...little bit taken out of context and little bit exaggerated," she said.

Huhtala was quoted as saying that ties between South-East Asian countries would go downhill unless its leaders "curb their sometimes offensive" criticism of Washington's foreign policy.

The US envoy's comments, contained in a speech made at a business forum on May 23 and released on the embassy's website on May 28, however did not single out Malaysia or Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Malaysia has been outspoken against America's foreign policies especially on its unilateral invasion of Iraq in March this year.

According to Huhtala, Washington and Kuala Lumpur enjoys "a very good and strong relationship" and she was only trying to enhance it.

"What I said was that we had some problems in the past and we really want to concentrate on the ways to improve it. In fact, it is a very good and strong relationship so I was trying in the spirit of constructive argument to explore ways to make it even better and I think you saw the fact the two leaders met in Evian, and indeed it is a good relationship and it is not nearly as bad as some people has thought I was trying to say," said Huhtala.

Dr Mahathir met the US President George W. Bush at the Enlarged Dialogue of the Summit of the Group of Eight (G8) in Evian and had described his meeting with Bush as "warm".

Meanwhile at today's event, an Indian-born American writer, Dr Bharati

Mukherjee, said that multiculturalism as it had been practised in the US in the past 10 years, implied the existence of a central culture, ringed by peripheral cultures.

"The fallout of official multiculturalism is the establishment of one culture as the norm and the rest as aberrations," she said.

-- BERNAMA

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