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Military

US REQUESTS MORE MONEY IN MILITARY TRAINING FOR MALAYSIA

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, Feb 5 (Bernama) -- The Bush administration is seeking from the United States Congress a sharp increase in military training spending for Malaysia to US\$1.2 million for fiscal year 2004, emphasising the president's commitment to win the global war on terror.

A US government official told Bernama here Tuesday that the amount requested by President George W. Bush from the new 108th Congress was an impressive increase from the US\$800,000 approved in the previous fiscal year.

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

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

The president's 2004 foreign assistance/foreign affairs budget, which begins on Oct 1, this year for all agencies, amounts to US\$28.5 billion.

Meanwhile, the US official, who declined to be identified, said that no financial support was being sought for the regional counter-terrorism centre proposed to be created in Kuala Lumpur.

"However, we are looking at ways in which we can be more supportive," he said, which might include sharing of information.

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

US funding of the proposed centre could mean Congressional scrutiny of how the centre is managed, demand for US authority in running the centre, and a yearly report of the progress of the centre 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 United States should tensions emerge," he writes.

On the possible "tensions," Schoff told Bernama that if the US invaded Iraq, relations with Malaysia could become complicated, but manageable if Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in power.

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