

11 JAN 2004

US-Najib

US BUSINESSES GIVE THE "THUMBS UP" TO NEW DPM AND CABINET

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, Jan 11 (Bernama) -- The American business community here gave the "thumbs up" to the appointment of Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak as the new deputy prime minister and the new cabinet under the leadership of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

In a Bernama interview with top executives at the US-Asean Business Council here Friday, they agreed that the appointment of Najib, who is known by senior members in the Bush administration following his visit to

Washington last year, bodes well for stronger US-Malaysia relations.

Najib, who also holds the defence portfolio, was warmly received by top officials of the Bush administration including National Security Adviser Condoleeza Rice and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld during his visit.

While here, Najib was invited to talk about Malaysia's defence and security at a packed luncheon hosted by a conservative think tank.

Following Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's leadership of 22 years, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi "seems to be very much in charge -- I'm a little surprised at how strong Abdullah came out of the gates," president of the council, Ernest Bower, said.

"The cabinet reshuffle and the naming of Najib is right. Our group is impressed at the strong actions taken to improve transparency and to fight corruption in Malaysia," he said.

Bower said he did not see Abdullah slowing down but with a different approach - "less emphasis on mega projects and more on small and medium-sized projects."

"We see new opportunities for US businesses in financial services, infrastructure, transportation, power generation, biotechnology and the services industry."

Bower led senior executives from 21 leading American companies to

Malaysia from Dec 7 to 9 where they called on Abdullah, Najib, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who assumed the Agriculture portfolio from Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs and Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein.

Chairman of the US-Malaysia Business Council, Michael Gadbow, said the change in leadership represented continuity.

"We can work together - the policies are clear, there's no mystery. We want to see Malaysia develop and become a partner in competing with the world - with China, Japan, Europe -- this is an exciting time.

For 2004, the council is lining up several programmes to promote US-Malaysian businesses including high level visits to Malaysia, said Marc Mealey, Director of US-Malaysia Business Council.

-- Bernama

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