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Anti-terrorism centre: US offers services, assistance

Koh Lay Chin

PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - The United States is looking forward to the establishment of the regional training centre here to counter terrorism and is willing to contribute its services to the centre.

Missouri Senator Christopher S. Bond said today that the US was "most anxious to work with Malaysia" to set up the proposed training centre this year.

"The American point of view is that Malaysia is doing an excellent job (in countering terrorism); we are learning from you. From the briefings and all we have learned, I do not know of any other country that is doing a better job than Malaysia," he said at a Press roundtable at the IOI Marriott Hotel.

Bond is on a two-day working visit to Malaysia to discuss various issues with Malaysian leaders, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

US Ambassador to Malaysia Marie Huhtala, who was also at the roundtable, said the US would offer its help to the centre in terms of providing instructors or drawing up a curriculum related to countering terrorism.

The centre, set to be operational this year, was proposed by Washington during the visit to Malaysia by US Secretary of State Colin Powell in July last year and Malaysia later agreed to it.

On the travel warnings issued by the US on Malaysia, Bond said it was routine for the US to notify their travellers about countries where certain "activities may be of concern".

"My message to the people in the US and in Missouri is that this is a wonderful place to visit ... there is much to learn and much to see. The warnings are for (the travellers), advising to be cautious," he said, adding that security measures that were sometimes "burdensome" were a necessary process and part of the caution the US had to exercise.

Bond said in his meeting with Najib yesterday, they spoke on a wide range of subjects related to co-operation and military matters, such as Malaysia's consideration on purchasing F/A-18 fighter aircraft from the US.

"I represent the State of Missouri, which has offered through the US Navy the sale of the F/A-18s to the Government of Malaysia," he said.

Bond, who has served Missouri as a Senator since 1986, also said he spoke about issues related to bio-technology with Agriculture Minister Datuk Effendi Norwawi yesterday and that they had outlined areas of co-operation between the two countries.

He would also speak to Dr Mahathir on biotechnology, he said, adding that: "In previous meetings, the Prime Minister expressed great interest in building Biovalley and to work in collaboration with US scientists and scientists from across the world."

Donald Danforth Plant Science Centre president Roger N. Beachy, who accompanied Bond on the working visit, said the co-operation in biotechnology would aim to provide healthier food products and a healthier environment, and to deal with problems afflicting crops throughout the world.

"We have been working with Mardi (Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute) since 1997 in research on diseases that attack rice and papayas. We are also working on developing genetically-modified plants

that are resistant to viruses," he said.

Beachy also said the co-operation would include looking at ways Malaysian farmers could grow their produce without using agro-chemicals as well as dealing with safety evaluation issues related to biotechnology.

"Malaysian scientists are hard-working and very well trained, but science moves very quickly so it is important that they continue to have access to new technologies and advanced laboratories," he said, adding that the projects between the two countries were long-term studies.

Bond said he came to Malaysia regularly for meetings with its leaders and that both countries had a very good working relationship.

"We appreciate Malaysia for taking a leadership role in fighting terrorism which is a threat to peace-loving people throughout the world and we value the friendship between us," he added.