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US BUSINESSMEN SEEK OPPORTUNITIES IN ASEAN COUNTRIES

By: Salmly Hashim

Washington, March 8 (Bernama) -- A large American business delegation is heading out to Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia for a one-week visit from Saturday to seek business opportunities in the region.

The delegation, led by the US-Asean Business Council, is made up of about 100 chairmans, chief executive officers (CEOs) and senior executives from medium and large companies ranging from water purification to aerospace.

Chairman of the council, George David, who is also chairman and CEO of United Technologies Corporation, said "the best way to cement relationships between governments is to cement the relationships between industries."

The best way to open markets is "not by pronouncements from Washington," but by trading and investing, creating jobs so that they would "embrace democratic market principles," David said at a reception to kick-off the business mission.

The council projects that the seven Asean nations -- Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and Vietnam -- with the future addition of Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, would create a market of half a billion people with a gross domestic product (GDP) of one trillion US dollars.

The delegation will arrive in Singapore on Sunday. Members will meet with Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, and briefed by the Singapore Economic Development Board and the Trade Development Board.

In Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday, key members of the delegation will have the opportunity to meet with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, participate in the second annual Malaysia-US Business Roundtable and attend a briefing on the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

In Jakarta, members of the delegation will participate in the Asean Business Summit. Speakers include Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Gen. Alexander Haig, who served as Secretary of State under the Reagan administration, in an interview said relations between US and Asean, as the regional grouping enters its 30th year, has been "very good, very solid, and very strong."

Describing the region as "the land of opportunity," Haig said "this is where the action is."

Gen. Haig is currently chairman of his own firm, Worldwide Associates, Inc. providing companies strategic advice on global political, economic and security environments.

Senator Lloyd Bentsen, who served as Treasury Secretary under the Clinton administration, said US-Asean relations are becoming closer because "they can mutually help each other."

"These countries are growing very fast and that means they need a lot of capital. And there's a great competition for capital around the world today," he said, like in Latin America and Eastern Europe.

On Myanmar's likely admission into Asean this year, US Senator Charles Robb said, "One of the things I'd like to do is to let Asean make its own decision ... When Asean decides to expand, the US will obviously work with and support that decision. But I believe that's a decision that should be left to Asean countries."

Gen. Haig agreed with Asean position of engagement with Myanmar, saying, "I believe strongly that you should reach out and that you maintain

dialogue."

"It's very important not to create obstacles on such issue as human rights ... which result in the termination of dialogue and good communication, he said. -- BERNAMA

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