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US-Asean

US SUPPORTS ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM

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WASHINGTON, May 24 (Bernama)-- The United States will continue supporting the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) as the security dialogue can help enhance regional security and understanding, the White House said in its annual policy report.

The Clinton administration said its strategic policy in Southeast Asia combined two approaches - maintaining its productive relationship with members of Asean, especially its security dialogue under ARF and pursuing bilateral objectives with Asean's individual members.

In the report entitled "A National Security Strategy For A New Century" the White House said bilateral talks with Asean nations were designed to prevent political or military instability, establish market-oriented market reforms and improvements in human rights practices.

President Bill Clinton reiterated US' emphasis in the Asia-Pacific region in the preface of the report: "We must reinforce our close ties to Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia and our Asean friends and allies."

"A prosperous and open Asia-Pacific region is key to the economic health of the United States," the report said.

The economies of the 18 members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum which includes members of Asean, comprised about one-third of the world's population, produced US\$13 trillion worth of goods and exported US\$1.7 trillion of goods annually, about one-half of the global totals.

The report said US economic objectives in the region included the continued progress within APEC towards liberalising trade and investment, increased exports to Asian countries through market-opening measures and levelling the playing field for US business and WTO (World Trade Organisation) accession for China and Taiwan on satisfactory commercial terms.

In an apparent reponse to criticisms againts the "western brand of democracy" from Asian leaders like Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the report says: "Some have argued that western-style democracy is unsuited for Asia or at least for some Asian nations - that human rights are relative and that Western nations' support for international human rights standards simply mask a form of cultural imperialism."

The report conceded that each Asian nation must find its own form of democracy, "and we respect the variety of democratic institutions that have emerged in Asia."-- BERNAMA

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