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Baucus

US SHOULD PAY MORE ATTENTION TO ASEAN, SAYS US SENATOR

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, Dec 3 (Bernama) -- The United States should pay more attention to Asean as several countries in the grouping struck by the financial crisis struggle to get back on their feet, US Senator Max Baucus said here Wednesday.

"We are doing an OK job in the region, but not perfect," said Baucus who followed Vice-President Al Gore to Kuala Lumpur for the Apec leaders Summit, and travelled with President Bill Clinton to Japan and South Korea last month.

"Some countries in the region feel neglected - they feel we pay too much attention to China and Japan. It's an accurate concern," said Baucus at a luncheon for senior business executives engaged in the region.

Baucus, a Democrat from Montana, is in his fourth senate term. He is a senior member in the Senate Agriculture Committee and is widely regarded as a leader on trade.

He regretted that Congressional members do not spend enough time solving international economic problems because "the effect of the crisis is starting to sink in" in the American heartland.

He said that Americans were now feeling the pain of the crisis as US exports of wheat, pulp, machinery, and products made by Boeing to Asia fell.

Later, when asked about Gore's offensive remarks on the reform movement in the region at the Leaders' Summit, Baucus said that the US should speak up for basic human values. "American deeds not words count."

"I talked to several Malaysians there who said that the Mahathir-Anwar issue is local. And we recognise the local sensitivity."

At the luncheon, President of the US-Asean Council, Ernie Bower expressed his disappointment at the lack of US leadership at the Apec meeting in KL.

Apec was supposed to be the momentum for Asia to get out of the crisis, and Asia was looking at the Western model led by the US, "but we ended up reinforcing the Japanese model rather than providing US leadership," said Bower.

Bower gave Apec's performance this year a "B minus."

The US-Asean Business Council, a non-profit organisation, promotes US trade and investment in the region. The group has 400 corporate members. At least 200 American businessmen turned up at the Apec meeting in KL this year.

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