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Region-US

TACKLE LAWLESSNESS, SAYS US ADMIRAL

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 11 (Bernama) -- Southeast Asian countries and their partners should look at ways to tackle lawlessness in certain parts of this region, said Commander-in-Chief of the United States Pacific Command Admiral Dennis C. Blair.

He said the disregard for the rule of law had led to people, including citizens of Malaysia and the US, being taken hostage.

"There are areas of lawlessness in this part of the world which countries of this region and those of us who are outside but who care about this part of the world should cooperate to eliminate," he said.

Blair was speaking at a media conference here today after holding separate talks with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

An American citizen is still being held hostage by an armed group in southern Philippines while in two separate incidents last year, two groups of people, including foreign tourists and Malaysians, were abducted by armed groups from two islands off Sabah, Malaysia, and taken by boat to southern Philippines.

Blair also said there should be a concerted effort to curb the trafficking of drugs in this region.

He said regional countries could also do well to enhance cooperation to check piracy on the high seas.

On another note, Blair commended Southeast Asia for doing "a pretty good job of keeping a peaceful situation".

"And, I think this will continue in the future," he said.

"Intra-regional strife or conflict is a remote idea in this area."

He gave importance to the Asean tradition of resolving disputes peacefully.

Blair will end his three-day visit to Malaysia tomorrow and his next stop is Cambodia.

-- BERNAMA

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