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⑧ Trip overseas.

MALAYSTA WILL NOT ATTEND APEC SUMMIT, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

from Zainoor Sulaiman

TIRANA, July 13 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reject a proposal by United States President Bill Clinton for a summit meeting of members of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) in Seattle in November.

The prime minister said the convening of such a conference would make Apec a formal regional trading group which Malaysia hoped could be avoided.

"We will not attend the meeting," he said at a press conference at the end of his three-day, official visit, the first by a Malaysian leader to this Balkan state.

President Clinton made the proposal during the recent summit of G7 industrialised nations in Tokyo.

Clinton had said that he was consulting leaders of the 15 Apec members to join him in Seattle in November for an "informal conference".

Western diplomats said the main aim of the gathering was to seek top-level backing for a programme to liberalise trade, investment and services in the Asia Pacific region. -- more

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Apec groups the Asean countries, the United States, Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Replying to a question whether the proposed Apec summit was aimed at undermining the East Asia Economic Caucus, Dr Mahathir said he would study the matter first, before making further comment.

It is understood that he would discuss the matter with President Suharto of Indonesia when they meet in Langkawi for their regular bilateral summit later this week.

Earlier this morning, Dr Mahathir was made a honorary citizen of Tirana when he visited the municipality. The award was conferred by Tirana mayor Sali Kelemendi.

Dr Mahathir is the second foreign leader to be conferred the status since the new democratic government in Albania. The first to receive the award was former US Secretary of State James Baker. -- more

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Kelemendi said the conferment was in recognition of the leadership of Dr Mahathir in striving for the progress and prosperity of Malaysia and the other developing countries.

Describing the award as a personal honour to him and the country, he said the Malaysian government was prepared to extend whatever assistance it could to the city administration of Tirana.

Albanian Prime Minister Aleksander Meksi and his wife accompanied Dr Mahathir and Datuk Seri Datin Paduka Dr Siti Hasmah from the Palace of Brigade (guest palace) to the airport for the ceremonial send-off...

Earlier, Albanian President Dr Sali Berisha called on Dr Mahathir at the guest palace to bid him farewell. -- Bernama

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