

# Summit in Seattle serves no purpose

IT APPEARS that Dr Mahathir Mohamad is the only leader in the region who has declined an invitation by President Bill Clinton's invitation to the Asia Pacific Economic Conference summit scheduled for November in Seattle.

The Prime Minister was the first to reject the high-level meeting when it was proposed by the US president after the G-7 leaders' conference in Tokyo in July. His reply has caught everyone by surprise.

There are sufficient grounds for the rejection and it is in the interest of other Asean members to reconsider the invitation. Firstly, there is no necessity to have a summit which will put a lot of the leaders in the region to reschedule their own

programmes.

There is nothing urgent to be discussed and it is just another attempt by the Americans to hijack the organisation and to stamp its mark on it. It is useless to get the heads of government together for no other purpose than to boost Clinton's ego.

Having such a meeting will not prove that the Americans are really interested in the welfare of its members as it will only put the other leaders in a lot of bother.

People will have high expectations on such a summit and it will be an anti-climax if it should prove to be just another occasion for talking about problems which every government and its people are aware of

## Comment

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anyway.

What people are interested in is the solutions which the seven richest countries in the world have to offer to have meaningful free trade instead of just paying lip service to this concept.

They can best do this by quickly coming to an agreement to complete the Uruguay Round of negotiations which are threatening the global trading and economic system.

They are allowing petty political issues at home to cloud their judg-

ment and the delay in any agreement will only lead to economic chaos where the developing nations will be hit the most.

The Americans have little leverage in the European Community with which their farmers are having a go at each other. They therefore have no intention of losing its grip in the Asia Pacific basin to the Japanese or the Chinese.

According to International Trade and Industry Minister Rafidah Aziz, Washington is keen that the Prime Minister

should change his mind about going to Seattle which is in the state of Washington.

The Americans are not used to leaders from developing countries turning down their invitation which they regard as a singular honour. The fact that someone can say *No* is a clear indication that Washington no longer calls the shots.

The Americans have been losing influence everywhere. They were even in the dark during the Israeli-PLO negotiations and the peace agreement therefore came as a shock to Washington.

If Washington had been in right from the start, the discussions would most probably not have gone on so smooth-

ly. If the Congressmen knew about it early, it would no longer be a secret as this news would definitely be splashed all over the American media and the wire services.

That the Americans have lost a lot of stature recently is recognised by all governments except perhaps in Washington. It is time that they accept that others have changed their perception of Washington even though it is the only superpower left.

The Americans may still be able to apply pressure here and there but then this does not hurt as much as it used to. Governments are really quite fed up with Clinton's tying of trade and economic assistance to human rights and the environment.

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