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Mahathir-Keating

KEATING FAILS TO PERSUADE MAHATHIR TO ATTEND APEC SUMMIT

From Kuala Lumpur

② Trip overseas

LIMASSOL (Cyprus), Oct 23 <sup>as</sup> (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Friday he can meet President Bill Clinton some other time and not necessarily at the summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum in Seattle next month.

He said he conveyed his stand to Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating who met him for the first time Friday for bilateral talks lasting more than an hour.

Keating, he told Malaysian newsmen, had tried to convince him to attend the summit proposed by President Clinton, saying that he (Keating) thought that the present American government was genuinely looking towards Asia, rather than Europe.

In his earlier talks with Singapore premier Goh Chok Tong, Dr Mahathir said he told the Singaporean leader that he would not be attending the summit, especially when they were proposing that the summit be held once every three years. -- more

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The prime minister also said that his refusal to attend the Seattle summit has to do with the position of the Clinton Administration on the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) which is not so clear at the moment.

The EAEC, pushed for by the Asean countries, is a consultative forum for countries in that region to discuss trade issues.

Dr Mahathir said Keating who was "very keen" on the Apec "did not force me to agree to go" to the Seattle meeting.

The Australian leader, he said, told him that Apec was not going to be a trade bloc and that "Apec wants to trade with everybody."

"He actually recommend that I go and meet Clinton," he said.

When pointed out that Australia too was not "positive" towards the EAEC, Dr Mahathir said; "But Australia do not have that kind of influence like the US on Japan and Korea."

He said until the US agreed, Japan and Korea would not come into the EAEC. -- more

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On their talks on bilateral ties, Dr Mahathir said there were some strained relations "but generally, the trade relation between the two countries is growing."

He said they also talked about the Vietnamese boat people still in Malaysian camp and whether Australia could resettle some of them.

Asked if Keating brought up the extradition attempt on Raja Kamarul Bahrin Raja Ahmad Shah, he said the Australian leader did not.

Australia is seeking the extradition of the Terengganu prince for allegedly abducting his son and daughter on the ground that he breached a Family Court order which gave custody of the children to their mother, Jacqueline Gillespie, an Australian citizen who was the prince's former wife. -- Bernama

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