

Dr Mahathir to attend Apec meeting in the Philippines

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says he will be going to Subic Bay in the Philippines for the fourth unofficial Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) leaders' meeting next year.

"I give my word that I will be in Subic to be with my friend President (Fidel) Ramos," he said at a Press conference yesterday.

A member of the Philippine Press had asked the question as Dr Mahathir only made the decision to attend the Osaka leaders' meeting about a week before the meeting was to start. The reporter said he was asking the question so as to spare Ramos the suspense of another last-minute decision by Dr Mahathir.

The Philippines will host next year's eighth ministerial meeting and Subic Bay is

expected to be the site of the leaders' meeting. Canada will be the next venue after that, and Malaysia in 1998 in conjunction with Apec's 10th anniversary.

The question of whether Dr Mahathir would attend the leaders' meeting arose because of his absence in the first leaders' meeting in Blake Island, Washington in the United States in 1993. Last year he was present at the meeting in Bogor, Indonesia.

"I will go to Subic, unless of course something happens. I don't think I should create tension anywhere," he said.

Dr Mahathir was asked again on the absence of United States President Bill Clinton at the meeting. Clinton could not attend because of domestic problems.

"I regret that Clinton cannot attend, but I understand

(the reason)."

He said Clinton's presence would have given a "greater sense of authority", but added that the absence was not felt that much as he was adequately represented by Vice-President Al Gore.

Dr Mahathir also said he saw no evident shift in Apec's leadership from the United States to Asia, as was suggested by some especially with Clinton's absence.

He said there was no question of anyone taking leadership in Apec, as all member economies were equal.

"We should hope that we are all equal and that there is no attempt by anyone to be the leader of Apec."

Dr Mahathir also commended Japan's stewardship in this year's meeting, and especially Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama,

who he said was fair and effective.

On a lighter note, Dr Mahathir said he had commented to Murayama that he had never seen Osaka so quiet before.

"I told the Prime Minister that it must cost a lot of money to the businessmen in Osaka (in terms of business opportunities lost)."

Residents around Japan's second largest city were told to avoid Osaka during the week-long Apec function. Security was tight in the city and this evidently affected daily activities here. Some businesses also had to close temporarily.

"I hope that this meeting will create more trade so that businessmen in Osaka can be compensated and redeem the business opportunities they lost during the meeting in the last five days," he said.