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FIRST ASEAN INFORMAL SUMMIT GETS UNDER WAY

JAKARTA, Nov 30 (Bernama) -- Asean heads of government today began their first informal summit at the Hilton Hotel here in what promises to be one of the most relaxed atmosphere ever set up for a leaders' meeting.

With the exception of Thailand, the one-day informal meeting is being attended by leaders of the seven Asean member states.

They are Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah of Brunei, President Suharto of Indonesia, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet.

Thailand is represented by its Deputy Prime Minister Amnuay Virawan.

The seven leaders will meet together in the morning before they adjourn for lunch when they would be joined by their counterparts from Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar.

The Asean leaders would then meet the leaders from the three Indochinese countries in the afternoon for discussions.

While Asean leaders talk in the morning, the leaders of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar will visit the Asean Secretariat.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to draw the attention of the Asean leaders towards the Mekong Basin Development Cooperation including the Trans-Asia railway link project.

The timing of Myanmar's entry into the Asean fold is widely expected to be a hot topic among the leaders.

Other issues expected to be discussed include the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone treaty, the South China Sea, the World Trade Organisation and the United States' Extra-territorial Act. -- BERNAMA

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