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APEC: LEADERS EXPECTED TO DISCUSS CURRENCY, HAZE ISSUES

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 12 (Bernama) -- Leaders from 18 economies in the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) Forum are likely to discuss issues related to Asia's currency crisis and smoke pollution at Apec's annual summit at Vancouver, Canada, from Nov 19 to 25.

"There are strong indications that these issues will be discussed," said Canada's High Commissioner to Malaysia, Andre S Simard, at a press briefing on the Vancouver forum.

Simard said several leaders had indicated their intention to raise the issues, especially given that the effects of currency turmoil in Southeast Asia also touched other Apec economies as well.

Apec comprises Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and the United States.

All the 18 leaders, including prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, have confirmed their attendance at Vancouver. Prior to the summit, senior officials will meet on Nov 19 and 20, then followed by trade and foreign ministers for the next two days.

The actual forum of the leaders begins on Nov 24, when they would sit with members of the Apec Business Advisory Council (ABAC). Malaysian representatives in the council are Malaysia Airlines executive chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli, Sime Darby chief executive officer Tan Sri Nik Mohamed Nik Yaacob and YTL Corporation executive Tan Sri Francis Yeoh.

The next day, the leaders' retreat will be at the Museum of Anthropology in the University of British Columbia, also in Vancouver. It is here that discussions could focus on the currency crisis and the haze.

Simard underlined three objectives of the Vancouver forum. They relate to trade liberalisation, assessing members' capacity to grow and develop their infrastructure, and the engagement of national economies to business communities, civil societies and other government and non-government movements including youth and women organisations.

He said there is hope that the leaders would endorse an Asia-Pacific framework on infrastructure development, the forum's main theme.

On trade liberalisation, Simard said discussions were likely to focus on reports on the Industrial Action Plan and to the early voluntary sectoral liberalisation (EVSL) which was proposed at last year's forum in the Philippines.

This agenda also covers discussions on 40 proposals for trade liberalisation and facilitation that had been tabled by Apec members. --

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