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Mahathir-Summit

DR MAHATHIR INVITES APEC LEADERS TO MALAYSIA NEXT YEAR

By: Salmy Hashim

VANCOUVER, Nov 26 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad Tuesday invited leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum to Malaysia for next year's Apec Leaders Summit from Nov 17-18.

The Kuala Lumpur meeting, the sixth Apec Leaders summit, will see the admission of three new members -- Russia, Vietnam and Peru -- expanding the Apec membership from 18 to 21.

The Fifth Apec Leaders Summit, which ended here Tuesday, agreed to impose a 10-year moratorium on membership beginning 1998.

Dr Mahathir said the participation of Russia in Apec would "add spice" to the leaders' discussions.

"Russia's presence would make the grouping more interesting and balance the different interests in Apec," he said at a press conference following the conclusion of the fifth Apec leaders summit here.

Russia has been looking to the West and "it's about time that they engage in the East," the prime minister said.

Dr Mahathir said a group of 21 leaders would be more manageable than a group of 50 or 100 leaders.

He said the last four Apec leaders' meetings he had attended had been useful because they allowed leaders to talk intimately among themselves to find ways to solve problems without the "bureaucrats whispering into the leaders' ears."

Eight other countries had applied to become members of Apec namely India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Macao, Panama, Sri Lanka, Colombia and Ecuador.

Israel and Venezuela have applied to become members of the non-Apec working group.

Dr Mahathir said that he would allow "the People's Summit", organised by non-governmental organisations, to be held at the next Apec meeting in Malaysia as long as it is organised in a peaceful manner.

He said, Malaysians are polite and are not against other people expressing their views as long as protesters are not rude, do not point their middle fingers at others or cuss at onlookers.

The Kuala Lumpur meeting, which would commemorate the 10th year of the founding of Apec, would review the trade and investment facilitation process and ensure that developing countries benefit from human resource development, technology sharing and economic and social development, Dr Mahathir said.

Equity, poverty alleviation as an integral part of sustainable development would also be on next year's agenda.

The economic ministerial from Nov 15-16 would finalise the early and voluntary liberalisation of nine sectors for implementation in early 1999.

The nine sectors shortlisted from the original 62 proposals are gems and jewellery, environmental products and services, fish and forestry products, toys, medical equipment, chemicals, energy and telecommunications.

Dr Mahathir said in jest that Malaysia might not be able to afford a lavish cultural show for the leaders next year because of the depreciating ringgit.

But, he said, it might persuade Bakti, a ladies' group headed by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, to perform several songs.

(Bakti is the charity organisation of the wives of Malaysian ministers

and deputy ministers).

Next year's meeting would lead to the formulation of an Apec agenda for science, technology and industry in the 21st century, Dr Mahathir said.

The meeting, he added, would also address the importance of cooperation and emergency preparedness in times of natural disasters such as the forest fires in Indonesia which have created a blanket of haze in neighbouring Asean countries.-- BERNAMA

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