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LEAD G15-Retreat

G15 LEADERS HOLD TALKS AT SEASIDE RETREAT IN HISTORICAL MELAKA

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

MELAKA, Nov 4 (Bernama) -- Leaders of the Group of 15 (G15) held talks at a beach resort overlooking the Straits of Melaka here as they gathered for a one-day retreat at this historical city.

Details of the closed-door meeting was not immediately available but officials said no agenda had been fixed.

The retreat was to enable the leaders to discuss any subject in a casual and relaxed atmosphere, a senior Wisma Putra official told Bernama before the meeting at the Riviera Bay Resort, about 10km from here.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is chairing the three-day summit, later led the other leaders for a brief tour of the city's historical complex at Bandar Hilir where remnants of Portuguese, Dutch and British buildings had been restored as tourist attraction.

Just as they had travelled here in the morning, the leaders left for Kuala Lumpur in a coach although some had skipped the tour to head back for the federal capital earlier.

Travelling along the North-South Expressway, the journey had taken them through the fringes of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) which is being developed as an information technology hub. Several signboards of the new KL International Airport in Sepang were visible.

Opening the summit yesterday, Dr Mahathir had welcomed developing countries to make use of the MSC, which had drawn the attention of the world's most innovative and successful companies involved in information technology (IT) and multimedia.

Other leaders attending the summit are President Suharto of Indonesia, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and President Liamine Zeroual of Algeria.

India and Argentina are represented by their vice-presidents Krishan Kant and Carlos Ruckauf, while Deputy Prime Minister Seymour Mullings represented Jamaica.

Other countries are represented by their ministers and Venezuela by its ambassador to Malaysia.

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Abu Zahar Isnin and state dignitaries were on hand to receive Dr Mahathir and the foreign VIPs at the complex.

The leaders were briefed on the country's history from the heyday of the Melaka Sultanate to the glory of independence when they visited the Cultural Museum and the Proclamation of Independence Building.

The museum takes the shape of a 15th century palace of Melaka's extinct sultanate and among others, showcases the many activities of the sultanate, traditional Malay arts and crafts.

The independence memorial was opened by the first Prime Minister, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, in conjunction with National Day on Aug 31, 1985 hosted by Melaka. Dr Mahathir had attended the opening ceremony.

Tunku had announced the date of the country's independence at Padang Pahlawan opposite the building on his return after successful negotiations from England on Feb. 20, 1956. The memorial draws about half a million visitors a year.

The leaders were also taken to the most-photographed site of the city, "A Famosa", which once served as a gateway to a Portuguese fortress. --

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