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Leaders kept far from protestors

THE Vancouver sky was grey and brooding, with low hanging clouds, when the Apec leaders emerged for the traditional group photographs from the Museum of Anthropology where they had been meeting since 9am

It was 12.15pm when they lined up on the gravel compound, where their places were already marked, with their backs to the harbour and the mountains. Immediately behind them was a shallow pond.

First several pictures were taken of them waving cheerfully and then of them joining hands.

After that they walked down a flight of wooden steps behind them to the waiting line of cream-coloured golf-carts - each to a cart - and were driven to a building called Mackenzie House for lunch.

The pool of reporters and photographers left the compound for the university's Faculty Club to wait.

When they saw them, the 800 protestors gathered nearby went into action.

Between them and the fence that kept them away from the cordoned-off area were about a thousand or so members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who just watched as the protestors waved their banners and shouted.

Suddenly the protestors surged forward, some managing to pull down part of the fencing. They were pushed back by the police who also used dogs and pepper spray.

Among the posters and banners held by the anti-Apec protestors were those saying "Freedom of Association", "Free Tibet" and "Traitors to humanity". Near them were also those with "Soeharto" and the swastika signs on them.

The meeting ended about 3.45pm and the leaders again lined up and faced the reporters and photographers, this time in the hall.

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien, as host and chairman, stood in the centre facing a microphone with Philippine President Fidel Ramos on the right and Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on his left. Chretien read the leaders' declaration.

(END)