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Summit-Arrivals

MORE ASEAN LEADERS ARRIVE FOR INFORMAL SUMMIT

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 14 (Bernama) -- More Asean leaders arrived today for the second Asean informal summit that begins with a working dinner to be hosted by summit chairman Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad here tonight.

The three-day summit likely to be dominated by the present currency turmoil will be attended by eight heads of state and government of the nine-member grouping.

The absentee is Indonesia's President Suharto who has cancelled his trip on his doctors' advice. He will be represented by Foreign Minister Ali Alatas.

The gathering is also known as the Commemorative Summit to celebrate Asean's 30th anniversary this year. Asean groups Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Among those who arrived earlier today were Philippine President Fidel Ramos, Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong.

The Sultan of Brunei and Myanmar's State Peace and Development Council chairman Than Shwe arrived yesterday.

Expected later today are China's President Jiang Zemin, Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and South Korean Prime Minister Koh Kun.

The three will be attending an informal summit with Asean for the first time tomorrow afternoon. The meeting is dubbed the Asean Plus 3 Summit.

The gathering of the East Asian leaders is also expected to focus on the financial crisis that had hit the region badly and left South Korea, Indonesia and Thailand seeking emergency assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Hashimoto is expected to announce assistance for reforms in Asean countries which have been hit by the currency turmoil. Japan is the largest foreign investor in Southeast Asia and is also Asean's biggest trading partner. Asean-Japan trade totalled US\$116.5 billion last year.

Officials said that Japan was also expected to stick to the decision taken in Manila last month on an IMF-linked facility fund to stabilise the currency turbulence.

The Asean Plus 3 Summit is also seen as a "de facto" East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) that was proposed by Malaysia back in 1990 but which had yet to gain the vital support of Japan due to pressure from the United States as the grouping excluded Washington.

Another key item on the agenda will be examining the prospects for East Asia in the 21st century and to discuss further Asia-Europe relations in view of next year's Asia-Europe Meeting in London.

The sticky point here is the opposition by Europe to the inclusion of Myanmar, which joined Asean this year, at the meeting.

Asean held its first informal summit in Jakarta last year. The grouping holds its formal summit every three years and the next is scheduled in Vietnam next year. -- BERNAMA

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