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APEC-News-Clinton

CLINTON TO GO TO KL DESPITE IRAQ CRISIS

WASHINGTON, Nov 14 (Bernama) -- United States President Bill Clinton is heading for Kuala Lumpur for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum Saturday night despite the Iraqi crisis and the impeachment inquiry gathering steam in the US Congress.

"The President is going," White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said here Friday in response to persistent questions on whether Clinton would cancel his trip to Asia as the US prepares for a military strike against Iraq.

However, the president only leaves Washington Saturday night leaving room for speculation that he might cancel his trip at the last minute and get vice-president Al Gore to take his place.

Lockhart, however, said, "the president very much wants to go" and attend the 21-nation economic summit which will be followed by stops in Japan, South Korea, and Guam.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Clinton will not be holding any one-on-one talks, but Lockhart said: "I can't explicitly rule out that the subject (of human rights as regards to Anwar Ibrahim) won't be raised in some form."

Malaysia had warned that any discussions on the former deputy prime minister, who is on trial on allegations of sexual misconduct and corruption, would amount to internal interference.

Lockhart said: "I think we'll reserve the right to express our opinions on the way that we will dictate."

Meanwhile, Clinton who has admitted to sexual misconduct with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, agreed Friday to pay Paula Jones, a former Arkansas state employee, US\$850,000 to drop her sexual harassment lawsuit -- with no apology or admission of guilt -- ending the four-year legal tussle that sparked the impeachment proceedings against him.

It was Clinton's sworn deposition for the Jones case that led to the impeachment hearings that begin next week in the House Judiciary Committee. The hearing will proceed while Clinton puts forward US proposal for resolving the financial crisis at the Apec summit in Kuala Lumpur.

Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr, who is investigating the president, Friday sent Congress fresh evidence from his investigations as the president agreed to settle the Jones case.

Starr's new evidence relates to charges that Clinton groped White House volunteer Kathleen Willey in a room near the Oval Office and could provide potential evidence of perjury.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, at a news conference before leaving for Kuala Lumpur, said that she planned to meet with Anwar's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, while she visits the Malaysian capital for the Apec ministerial next week.

"I am planning to meet her...the purpose of it is to signal the fact that we're very concerned about what is happening to Anwar, who...has made very clear his own dedication to democracy and a market economy," she said.

Albright did not specify when or where the meeting would take place.

-- BERNAMA

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