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APEC-NEWS-MAHATHIR LEAD

DR MAHATHIR REGRETS CLINTON'S ABSENCE AT APEC

By: E. Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 15 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed regret that US President Bill Clinton will not be able to attend the Apec summit on Nov 17-18.

"If US President Bill Clinton had come here for the Apec leaders summit, he would have known that contrary to press reports, Malaysia is a peaceful country," he told reporters during a dialogue session after opening the Apec Business Summit here.

"If he had come here (to Kuala Lumpur) he could verify the Herald Tribune report," Dr Mahathir said apparently referring to a report in the "International Tribune" that Malaysia was experiencing riots over the sacking and arrest of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said Clinton had never been to Malaysia although many Americans have been here.

"Some have never been here (but) talk about the deteriorating situation in Malaysia " Dr Mahathir said.

On the standoff between the US and Iraq, Dr Mahathir said he had always hoped that "we can settle the Iraq problem through negotiation."

He did not think that bombing Iraq would do anything better to solve the problem.

He said Saddam Hussein will survive in his bunker while innocent lives will be lost.

Also present at the opening of the business sumit held concurrently with the Apec meetings was Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori, who was the first foreign Apec leader to arrive for the summit beginning Tuesday.--BERNAMA

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