

17/11/1998

Hectic schedule for Dr M as more world leaders arrive

THE heads of government who arrived ahead of today's Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation leaders' meeting had a hectic schedule holding bilateral discussions yesterday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad spent eight hours holding talks with eight leaders at the Palace of the Golden Horses while his counterparts also had a tight schedule.

Dr Mahathir met South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, Chinese Taipei's chairman of Economic Planning and Development Council Dr Chiang Pin-Kuan, and Australia Prime Minister John Howard in the morning and Sultan of Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Philippine President Joseph Estrada, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori and Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai in the afternoon.

For the leaders of Australia, the Philippines and South Korea, this was their first meeting with Dr Mahathir since the financial crisis hit the region last year.

The leaders spoke on various issues of mutual interest, among them the financial crisis and the Early Voluntary Sectoral Liberalisation scheme which the Ministers had decided to refer to the World Trade Organisation.

Briefing reporters after Dr Mahathir's talks with Kim, Goh and Dr Chiang, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the talks touched on a spectrum of issues.

Apart from focusing on Apec matters, the leaders also discussed political issues.

Abdullah said the talks with Goh touched on the water agreement and Singapore's assistance in economic recovery.

On discussions with Kim, he said the South Korean President expressed hope that Malaysia would continue its "Look East Policy".

South Korea viewed the policy as a good mechanism to solve the current economic problem.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, who also briefed reporters on the bilateral talks, said both South Korea and Singapore agreed that there was a need to have measures on short-term capital flow control in place as soon as possible.

South Korea, Rafidah said, also proposed exchanging information with Malaysia on ways to overcome the economic and financial problems.

"Also we should not just allow G7 to determine the measures towards an orderly world financial regime, rather we should use a wider forum like the G22. We agreed that the G22 should be promoted as a core group to discuss this matter," Rafidah said.

Howard said he had discussed with Dr Mahathir matters of mutual interest.

"Bilateral relations with Malaysia are very important to us. About 150,000 Malaysians have been educated in Australia. Our links are very close.

"It is a very important relationship and I will be working very hard to keep the good relationship, recognising that from time to time, there are going to be differences in opinion," he said.

Howard said he had raised the issue of Anwar's arrest and had a lengthy discussion with Dr Mahathir.

He said Dr Mahathir gave his explanation on the matter.

Goh said while bilateral matters were discussed, talks with his

Malaysian counterpart were mainly on issues like the financial crisis and trade liberalisation.

"We should focus on bilateral ties after the Apec meeting. To be fair to Dr Mahathir, who is chairman of the Apec Economic Leaders' Meeting, we defer bilateral matters until after Apec.

"We will get down to the nitty-gritty after Apec.

"Dr Mahathir and I decided that financial crisis is a major issue ... More important now is how to deal with the financial crisis," Goh added.

Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, who accompanied Chuan at the meeting with Dr Mahathir, told reporters that the Thai Prime Minister had discussed the impact of exchange rate control on trade at the Thai border.

Meanwhile, more heads of government arrived yesterday for the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation leaders summit, including US Vice-President Al Gore who arrived in a presidential carrier.

Gore, representing President Bill Clinton, arrived at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang at 9.30am. Clinton had cancelled his trip because he had to be in Washington to monitor the situation in Iraq.

The Vice-President was welcomed by Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek.

Members of the media who were assigned to cover the arrival of US officials underwent verification checks conducted by US secret service agents at the main gate leading to the VVIP building at the airport.

About an hour later, Chilean President Eduardo Frei Ruiz Tagle arrived at the airport and was welcomed by Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa.

About 11am, the Canadian official government carrier touched down and parked outside the VVIP building. Prime Minister Jean Chretien, accompanied by wife Aline, alighted and were welcomed by Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud.

Just before noon, Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai arrived and was welcomed by Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob.

Vietnamese Prime Minister Pan Van Khai arrived shortly after on board a specially chartered Vietnam Airlines carrier and Megat Junid was present to receive him.

Vietnam, together with Peru and Russia, are the three new members of Apec which now has a membership of 21.

Just after noon, Philippine President Joseph Estrada arrived on board a specially chartered Philippine Airlines Airbus A320 aircraft. He was met on arrival by Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and wife Datin Ena Ling.

Accompanying Estrada was wife Dr Luisa P. Ejercito Estrada and Cabinet members.

Philippine ambassador to Malaysia Jose Brillantes, Foreign Affairs Secretary Domingo Siazon and Trade Secretary Jose Pardo were also at the airport.

A 75-member business delegation accompanied the President on his maiden trip to Malaysia.

At 2.30pm, the Royal Brunei royal carrier, with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, touched down at the airport. Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, was present to welcome the Brunei leader.

Dignitaries who arrived last night were Japan Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and President of Mexico Dr Ernesto Zedillo.

Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Bill Skate, Indonesian President B.J. Habibie and Russian Federation Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov are scheduled to arrive this morning.

(END)

