

14/11/1998

`No request for bilateral talks with Chretien'

MINISTER of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said it was customary for the past Apec chairman to meet the current chairman, and for this reason Malaysia had informed the Canadian High Commissioner of this tradition.

She said Malaysia had not requested a bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Jean Chretien and Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"We have told the Canadian High Commissioner here that according to Apec tradition, the present chairman meets the past chairman and the future chairman. That's all. It's not a bilateral request at all."

She was commenting on recent media reports which said Canada had turned down Malaysia's request for a bilateral meeting for Chretien and Dr Mahathir.

Speaking to reporters after an exclusive interview with Reuters Television, she said any bilateral meeting would be arranged upon request from the leaders and that Malaysia had received requests for such meetings.

Rafidah said it was for the Canadian Prime Minister to decide if he wanted to break the Apec tradition.

However, she said the Malaysian Government was still waiting for an official decision on the matter.

"We haven't heard from him (Chretien). I have only heard from second hand sources. I do hope no one is politicising it. We are just being very objective on the issue."

Rafidah also said for Apec to be more effective, political issues should be left out of the grouping.

"But some people want to politicise Apec and there is nothing we can do about it but if people want to see Apec work, then do not involve politics in it because if one country digs up something political and links it to Apec, so can other countries."

(END)