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APEC-NEWS-ANWAR

DON'T BRING UP ANWAR'S ISSUE AT APEC, SAYS RAFIDAH

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 10 (Bernama) -- If any Apec leader were to raise the issue of the arrest and trial of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at their summit here next week, Malaysia would regard it as interference in the country's internal affairs, the Minister of International Trade and Industry, Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, said today.

"You can't imagine how, if the Apec summit was being held in Washington, if (US President Bill) Clinton was asked about his affair with Monica Lewinsky," she said when asked what would Malaysia's reaction be if leaders brought up Anwar's issue.

"We have to give due deference to what Apec is all about," she said after launching the International Media Centre at the Mines Exhibition Centre here for journalists covering the Apec meetings.

Leaders from 21 economies will meet for the annual summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Forum on Nov 17 and 18 following the ministerial and senior officials meetings between Nov 12 and 16.

Several leaders of Apec economies have commented on Anwar's arrest but of late, some have indicated it was their personal opinion while others said they would stick to the Apec agenda.

Rafidah said that "we (Apec) have enough on our hands for leaders and ministers to talk without having to divert their attention."

"It (Anwar's issue) has got nothing to do with Apec and more so, it is a very internal matter," she said.

"I would regard anybody, leaders or otherwise, bringing up the issue and talking about the internal matter as interference," she said.

"I do not think there is time for anybody to discuss at length what's already on the agenda," the minister said in reference to the packed agenda amidst the backdrop of the possibility of some officials of wanting to raise the Anwar issue.

Asked what if some leaders brought up the Anwar issue at the bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Rafidah said:

"Again, we don't expect the Prime Minister to ask, for instance, President Clinton how's the impeachment (against the US president) is going on, please quote me on that." -- BERNAMA

TEAM SHY