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Apec-Mahathir

DR MAHATHIR NOT GOING TO APEC SUMMIT

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will not attend the Sept 12-13 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit meeting in New Zealand, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

He said Dr Mahathir's absence was because of a heavy domestic schedule and was not a snub to Apec nor related to the impending general election or his health.

"Dr Mahathir is in good health, he told me on Wednesday that he has many things to attend to and so many speeches to make within the country," Syed Hamid said in answer to queries from reporters after handing over a donation of US\$100,000 from the Malaysian government to Turkish ambassador Koray Targay in aid of victims of the recent earthquake in Turkey.

The prime minister is continuing his nation-wide tour and is scheduled to visit Pahang, the Federal Territory, Selangor and Sabah over the next two weeks.

Syed Hamid said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi would represent the prime minister at the summit of the 21-member forum of Pacific Rim leaders.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir would be in New York from Sept 25 to 29 for the annual United Nations General Assembly and in Zimbabwe for the Third South Africa International Dialogue from Oct 2 to 6.

"He just wants to make sure that he has got good breathing space," said the foreign minister.

Dr Mahathir's absence from the Apec summit should not be viewed negatively, said Syed Hamid.

"It is good that his deputy is going, so I would not give any adverse or negative meaning to (his absence)...Malaysia will take part in the Apec forum, we will express our views," he said.

Answering another question, Syed Hamid said: " We are not doing anything to signal that Apec is no longer necessary or unimportant...it is there and its going to continue to be there."

Syed Hamid pointed out that it was not a boycott, adding that " people should not interpret anything more than just that he cancelled the trip because he had many things to attend to in the country".

He said United States Vice President Al Gore came to last year's Apec summit here in place of President Bill Clinton but still the US considered Apec an important forum.

Dr Mahathir himself had recently hinted that he would not attend this year's Apec summit.

"Frankly, I don't expect much from Apec. Apec has shown that it is unwilling to take decisive steps, particularly with regard to the financial crisis," the prime minister had said.

"I don't expect Apec to achieve much in New Zealand," Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying recently.

-- BERNAMA

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