

Politics, trade top agenda

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BANGKOK: Politics, including the war on terror, and economic issues are vying for attention in the annual summit of the 21-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum today and tomorrow.

Political issues, often discussed during the series of bilateral and other side dialogues between leaders, have the tendency to influence discussion at the main forum.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will also take part in a dialogue on globalisation and its challenges with some 500 captains of industry from the Asia Pacific region today.

Mahathir, who has consistently called for globalisation to provide equitable benefits to all countries rather than the rich exploiting the developing nations, will join Prime Minister Helen Clark of New Zealand and President Ricardo Lagos of Chile in the discussions.

Malaysia has always insisted that countries open up their markets based on their domestic capacities with time given to developing and poor countries

to build up their industries and economies.

Mahathir told Malaysian journalists here he hoped Apec would revert to its original purpose of formation and not stray into a security forum.

He said the grouping should stick to its objective of economic cooperation and not enlarge its scope.

Bush rewards Thais, warns North Korea pg12

"Apec was formed as an economic cooperation group. But we don't agree taking away economic matters into security, military or politics, which are not really for Apec," Bernama quoted him as saying.

As this would be his last Apec gathering before he retires on Oct 31, he hoped it would give him an opportunity to bring Apec back to its original reason of formation.

"I want to explain our stand on what

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Let's focus on trade, says Mahathir

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Apec should focus. We think it should focus on items like fair trade, equitability, and not enlarging its present scope," he said.

Asked if there was a danger of Apec becoming a security forum, Mahathir said that could happen because of the present situation.

"We know security matters are very important. But I think we should discuss it at other forums. Security does not only affect certain countries, but the whole world," he said.

Bangkok is in lockdown mode with an unprecedented 20,000 soldiers and other security personnel deployed for the summit after a series of deadly attacks in Asia and the

August arrest in central Thailand of the region's top terror suspect, Hambali.

Thousands more international security agents are guarding leaders, including US President George W. Bush, Chinese President Hu Jintao, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Japan's Junichiro Koizumi.

Apec host Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is revelling in his moment in the international spotlight and ensured the usually chaotic capital has been scrubbed and sanitised to impress the VIP visitors.

The US used the broadcast of a new audio tape purportedly by Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden to bolster its case that "the war on terror goes on" and nations must bind

together against the threat.

"This is still a dangerous world," Bush told reporters yesterday.

However, most members on the Asian side of the Pacific want Apec to stick to the agenda of boosting prosperity that has been its main goal since its inauguration in 1989.

"If the talks go beyond economic issues, we don't want to see the relationship among members in the forum deteriorate," Thaksin said. - Agencies

