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APEC-LEADERS

SECURITY AND WTO ISSUES HIGH ON LEADERS' AGENDA

By: Siti Hawa Othman

BANGKOK, Oct 19 (Bernama) -- The 11th Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Economic Leaders meeting kicks off tomorrow with issues concerning security and the failure of the recent World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks in Cancun, Mexico, among the highlights for discussion.

The US is expected to push for issues concerning security and how to counter terrorism to be discussed, but this could see some opposition from Asean countries.

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had said that Asean felt that the meeting should be confined to Apec's original goal.

"Anything to do with terrorism is not related to this objective, unless it affects the economy," he told reporters after an Asean-7 leaders working luncheon hosted by him today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who arrived here this morning, hopes that Apec would revert to its original purpose of formation and not stray into a security forum.

He said that the 21-member group should stick to its objective of economic cooperation and not enlarge its scope.

Dr Mahathir will have a dialogue session at the CEO Summit tomorrow morning on globalisation and its challenges.

Meanwhile, leaders have already converged into this city for the meeting which will also see the attendance of US President George W. Bush, who is on a six-nation tour of the region.

The Apec leaders will have their first retreat in the afternoon and later meet Apec Business Advisory Council (ABAC).

They will be granted an audience with the King and Queen of Thailand later in the evening before proceeding for a Gala Dinner.

On Tuesday, the leaders will have their second retreat in the morning and later in the evening, the Apec's declaration will be read to conclude the meeting. -- BERNAMA

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