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`Leaders won't take home Mercedes'

reports on "Conference of Heads of State or Government of The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) 2003" by Ashraf Abdullah; Tony Emmanuel; Kamarulzaman Salleh; Joniston Bangkuai; Noradzman Baharuddin; Ramlan Said; Kamarul Yunus; Sharanjit Singh; Kasmiah Mustap

HEADS of Government and State attending the 13th summit will not be taking home new Mercedes Benzs used to transport them in the past two days, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when asked to confirm rumours of this possibility.

An Australian journalist had asked whether it was true that NAM leaders have been enticed to attend the summit with gifts of the new luxury cars.

The Prime Minister said: "This is the first time I am hearing this."

Turning the table against the female journalist who posed the question, Dr Mahathir said he was sorry that there was no delegation from Australia in NAM.

"But don't be too disappointed as we are not giving away the Mercedes. The cars are on loan for the summit, so will return them."

A Pakistani journalist asked whether Dr Mahathir was afraid of US retaliation over some of his blunt criticism, he replied: "Like everybody else, I am scared. When you stick out your neck, it might be chopped off, but so far it is still intact."