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CHOGM-CONSENSUS

KUALA LUMPUR, OCT 16 (BERNAMA) -- THE COMMONWEALTH TRADITIONALLY GOES ABOUT ITS BUSINESS BY CONSENSUS BUT THIS IS UNLIKELY TO BE SO WHEN IT COMES TO CHOOSING THE SUCCESSOR TO SECRETARY-GENERAL SIR SHRIDATH RAMPHAL AT THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING (CHOGM) BEGINNING HERE ON WEDNESDAY.

WITH ONLY TWO DAYS TO GO, NEITHER A COMPROMISE NOR A CONSENSUS IS IN SIGHT, CONFERENCE SOURCES SAID.

CHOGM CHAIRMAN AND HOST PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAHAD SAID AT A PRESS CONFERENCE EARLIER TODAY THAT IF A CONSENSUS WAS NOT REACHED, BALLOTING WOULD BE HELD TO ELECT THE NEW HEAD OF THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT. SIR SHRIDATH'S THIRD FIVE-YEAR TERM ENDS IN THE MIDDLE OF NEXT YEAR.

BOTH CANDIDATES FOR THE JOB -- FORMER AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER MA LCOLM FRASER AND COMMONWEALTH DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL CHIEF EMEKA ANYAOKU OF NIGERIA -- HAVE SPENT THE BEST PART OF THIS YEAR LOBBYING GOVERNMENTS AND NEITHER SEEMS TO WANT TO BACK OUT.

THE SOURCES SAID THAT FRASER, APART FROM GETTING THE FULL BACKING OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT, COULD ALSO COUNT ON THE SUPPORT OF CANADA, MOST OF THE ASIAN COUNTRIES, BRITAIN, THE SOUTH PACIFIC NATIONS AND EVEN SOME AFRICAN NATIONS. -- MORE

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+WHILE CHIEF ANYAOKU DOES SEEM TO HAVE THE NUMBERS, THERE IS ENOUGH SUPPORT FOR FRASER TO ALLOW FOR A FRACTIOUS VOTE, A SOURCE SAID.

BUT CHIEF ANYAOKU WHO ARRIVED HERE LAST WEEK IS CONFIDENT OF BEING ELECTED WHEN HE SAID THAT HE WAS WAY AHEAD IN THE COUNT, BANKING ON THE

VOTE FROM THE REST OF THE AFRICAN COUNTRIES AND INDIA, AMONG OTHERS.

THE SOURCES SAID INDIA STRUCK A BARGAIN WITH NIGERIA IN SUPPORTING CHIEF ANYAOKU IN RETURN FOR A SIMILAR BACKING FOR INDIA'S MANMOHAN MALHOTRA, THE COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL* TO MOVE UP TO

SUCCEED HIM.

THOSE COUNTRIES NOT THROWING THEIR SUPPORT FOR CHIEF ANYAOKU DID SO TO

AVOID THE LEADERSHIP OF THE COMMONWEALTH BEING IN THE HANDS OF VIRTUALLY

PERMANENT OFFICIALS, THEY SAID, POINTING OUT THAT CHIEF ANYAOKU HAS BEEN

WORKING AT THE SECRETARIAT FOR NEARLY 25 YEARS.

THE MOOD AT THIS SUMMIT IS ONE OF PUTTING THE SECRETARIAT UNDER THE

MICROSCOPE WITH A VIEW TO IMPLEMENTING NECESSARY CHANGES TO BEEF UP THE

ORGANISATION.

NEXT YEAR, THE SECRETARIAT WILL BE 25 YEARS OLD AND THE TIME IS OPPORTUNE FOR STOCKTAKING, THEY ADDED. -- MORE

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+WHOEVER BECOMES ITS HEAD, A LOT OF CHANGES ARE LIKELY, SAID A SOURCE.

THE SOURCES SAID CHIEF ANYAOKU WOULD BE TOO DIPLOMATIC A MAN TO EFFECT THOSE CHANGES, HAVING BEEN IN THE SECRETARIAT EVER SINCE ITS INCEPTION.

FRASER COULD BE EXPECTED TO STEER THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT INTO NEW

DIRECTIONS IN FACING THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY.

+FRASER WILL ADD STATURE TO THE JOB, THEY SAID.

MALAYSIA! AS CHAIRMAN OF THE SUMMIT, HAS REITERATED THAT IT WILL REMAIN

NEUTRAL IN THE CONTEST.

THE COMMONWEALTH LEADERS ARE EXPECTED TO DECIDE ON THE NEW SECRETARY-GENERAL DURING THEIR WEEKEND RETREAT ON LANGKAWI ISLAND. --

BERNAMA

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