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Mahathir-ASEM

MAHATHIR ARRIVES IN BANGKOK FOR ASIA-EU SUMMIT

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

BANGKOK, Feb 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here today for a busy four-day visit during which he will attend the inaugural Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), hold bilateral talks with Asian and European counterparts and address an international conference.

He told reporters at the Hotel Shangri-la where he is staying that he hoped something positive would emerge from the historic meeting between leaders of the European Union (EU) and East Asia, two of the three major economic regions of the world.

Asked about the possibility of European leaders raising contentious issues considered sensitive by certain Asian countries, such as those on human rights and other social, political and labour matters, Dr Mahathir said if they did, "we can discuss them."

Dr Mahathir also said it was not yet time for ASEM to have a secretariat, as proposed by some European countries.

This evening, Dr Mahathir will attend an informal meeting with other heads of government of the 10 Asian countries here for the summit opening tomorrow.

The meeting chaired by Thai Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-Archa was called to coordinate Asia's position and to resolve any outstanding matters ahead of the summit to be held at the Queen Sirikit Convention Centre.

The meeting brings together leaders of the dynamic East Asia region-- the seven Asean partners -- Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam -- plus China, Japan and South Korea and their counterparts from the 15-member EU.

But four EU heads of government from Spain, Greece, Sweden and Denmark are unable to be here because of domestic problems at home.

All the leaders accompanied by their Foreign Ministers will attend a dinner hosted by Banharn tonight.

The Thai Premier is scheduled to brief the leaders on the progress achieved so far by their ministers and senior officials on issues on the summit's agenda, which basically are aimed at enhancing economic and political ties between the two regions.

Also in the Malaysian delegation are International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and acting Foreign Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar. -- BERNAMA

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