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Mahathir-Arrival

MAHATHIR ARRIVES IN ZIMBABWE FOR G-15 SUMMIT

By: Kuah Guan Oo

HARARE, Nov 2 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here today to attend the sixth summit of the Group of 15 developing countries (G-15) starting tomorrow.

The Prime Minister, who was accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, was met on arrival by host President Mugabe of Zimbabwe and senior Malaysian officials.

Dr Mahathir, who is in the Zimbabwean capital for the second time in as many months, is scheduled to discuss and decide on various issues before the six-year grouping that was set up to act as a catalyst, and spearhead greater economic cooperation among themselves and Third World countries.

On the agenda of the three-day summit are the current international economic situation and prospects for the promotion of trade among developing countries; promoting South-South cooperation; report by ministers on the activities of the G-15 including administrative and financial issues and the future role and direction of the group, including expansion of membership.

A statement from the secretariat said that in their discussions on the current international economic situation, the leaders would focus on the issues before the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial conference; the opportunities and challenges in the international trading system and the unilateral actions (of super powers) with extra-territorial effects which could distort international trade.

The heads of state/government are also scheduled to go for their retreat at Victoria Falls on Monday where the issues for possible discussions include the negative effects of globalisation in developing countries' economies.

Other issues include unilateral actions with extra-territorial effects which could distort international trade; international terrorism and joint efforts to combat it, and enhancing South-South cooperation and the future role of the G-15 in a globalising and liberalising world economy.

The leaders are to return to the Zimbabwean capital on Tuesday to close their summit.

Yesterday, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he was informed that five heads of state/government and four deputy/vice presidents were coming for the summit.

While new Indian Prime Minister Deve Gowda has been slated for a bilateral meeting with Dr Mahathir, it is not known who are the other leaders coming for the summit.

Meanwhile, President Mugabe has hit out at the WTO ahead of the annual summit, saying that it should not insist on levelling global trade without giving developing countries time to reform economies to enable them to compete with the advanced nations.

The Zimbabwean daily "The Herald" quoted him today as saying that it was unfair for the WTO to talk about removing trade barriers to trade when developing countries were already marginalised on the international market. Developing member countries of the WTO, the successor to the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, were operating in an uneven global trading environment characterised by restricted access to markets.

Mugabe said among the issues to be discussed at the summit tomorrow would be "our fears that the WTO is insisting on having a level playing field" which would disadvantage poor countries because of the level of

economic development.

"The WTO cannot create an even ground. The WTO must first recognise that we must take steps that are necessary to raise our economies to the same level as developed countries," he said. -- BERNAMA

KGO SK