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Edinburgh gears up to receive Commonwealth guests, and cash

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THE Scottish economy stands to reap STG13.5 million (about RM70 million) this month as a result of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting or CHOGM in Edinburgh from Friday to Monday.

The income will come from the rental of the Edinburgh International Conference Centre - the venue for the meeting - by the Edinburgh City Council.

In what is only the EICC's second year in operation, the prestigious venue continues to exceed all expectations of its economic benefits to Scotland.

In the 12 months to March 31 this year, the centre brought in a total of STG9.5 million.

"CHOGM will enhance the EICC's reputation in the global market and enable it to compete for more international events while bringing more revenue to Scotland," the council's head of communications Isabell Reid said on Thursday.

She was briefing London-based foreign correspondents on the council's role in ensuring the successful organisation of the 20th CHOGM.

The correspondents were invited to a two-day tour of all the official venues of the meeting by the London Correspondents Service.

The LCS is an office under the Foreign Office whose functions, among other things, involves the promotion of activities between the United Kingdom and foreign countries.

The meeting will be attended by over 50 heads of Government, mostly Prime Ministers and Presidents, with their delegations and accompanying media. It will be opened by Queen Elizabeth who is also the head of the Commonwealth.

Malaysia's delegation will be headed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will be arriving in Edinburgh on Thursday. The following day he will receive a Honorary Fellowship from the Royal College of Physicians.

This is an honour to Malaysia as Dr Mahathir will be the only head of Government to be accorded the prestigious award while attending the CHOGM.

The overseas Press corps will be contributing a substantial amount of the STG13.5 million revenue expected by the council.

So far about 15,000 members of the Press from all the Commonwealth countries have confirmed participation in the meeting and have requested accreditation which is handled by the Commonwealth Secretariat in London.

Reid said it was expected that each correspondent would spend a minimum of STG100 a day. When one takes into account that the journalists would be there for at least five days, the event is destined to give Scotland's economy a much needed boost.

Though the meeting will only officially begin on Friday, participants, particularly members of the Press and Commonwealth Government officials have already started arriving in Edinburgh.

And this includes New Straits Times news editor Syed Nadzri. NST group editor Datuk A. Kadir Jasin will also be there. I will join them on Thursday after covering the Prime Minister's three functions in London.

The Prime Minister will deliver a keynote address, Translating vision into reality: The Malaysian Experience at the Churchill Auditorium of the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre.

He will also give a lecture on Asia's place and Asia's role in the

making of a global Commonwealth at the Stationer's Hall.

I will be at the Hotel Inter-Continental after that where Dr Mahathir will be among the eight Commonwealth Heads of Government keynote speakers at the Commonwealth Business Forum.

This forum is organised by the British Government, Commonwealth Secretariat and Financial Times Conferences.

Dr Mahathir will address Commonwealth business leaders on The key issues for the Commonwealth in promoting trade and investment. He will then depart for Edinburgh.

While in Scotland, foreign journalists and television crews will also be guests at a dinner hosted by the Edinburgh Press Club. They will be treated to an elaborate dinner plus a free flow of beverages.

Frank Sullivan, a senior member of the Press Club, said that it had been in existence since World War II.

It survived the war with all its veteran members continuing to be active - though no longer as media players.

"Once a journalist, forever a journalist," Sullivan said. The veteran journalist, who left a leading UK daily four years ago, is now working for a state-owned company as a senior Press and public relations executive.

The Press Club has its own building which houses a media centre, a bar and restaurant, and is all set to give newsmen a warm welcome and ensure their stay is a comfortable one if not enjoyable.

Their motto is "You are welcome, We need the money". Honorary members are most welcome.

Being a guest of the Press Club, I was given, on the spot, honorary membership, which will enable me to enjoy its media and recreational facilities.

It seems to me that the Press has played a pivotal role in moulding the nation, and Press clubs like in Edinburgh only serve to uphold the proud tradition and camaraderie in the fraternity.

Perhaps the long history and operation of the Edinburgh Press Club will serve as a reminder to some of the foreign journalists to improve the running of their own clubs back home.

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