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OIC-summit

IRAN ROLLS OUT RED CARPET FOR ISLAMIC SUMMIT

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 3 (Bernama) -- Iran is rolling out the red carpet for heads of government of Islamic nations gathering in Tehran next week for the summit meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

For Iran, itself the world's leading carpet producer, it will be hosting the biggest gathering of foreign dignitaries in two decades and the last OIC summit to be held this century.

Deputy Chief of Mission of the Iranian Embassy here Javad Shahidi said today all the OIC 55 member countries had accepted invitation to attend the triennial eighth summit from Dec 9 to 11.

The summit will be preceded by the senior officials and foreign ministers' meetings.

"This is a good sign...we are optimistic that the summit will bring the Muslim countries closer to one another," he said in an interview with Bernama.

He said the summit would also enable Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, who was elected in May, to establish contacts with the other Muslim leaders, many of whom would be meeting him for the first time.

Shahidi said Iran was looking forward to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's presence for he "is a proven international figure".

"He has been active in the international community including in defending the Islamic rights, we expect him to do the same at the coming OIC summit," he said.

"As Dr Mahathir has said that the Islamic ummah needs to achieve things instead of just talk, he may have some new ideas to share at the OIC summit," Shahidi said.

Incidentally, he said, Dr Mahathir was the first foreign leader that Iran had invited to the summit.

Apart from kings, presidents and prime ministers of OIC countries, invitations had also been extended to the heads of several international organisations including United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan to attend the summit.

Shahidi said the summit was expected to focus on the need for the Muslim world stretching from Asia to Africa and ranging from wealthy states in the Persian Gulf to Central Asian republics, to step up cooperation in the economic field.

"We should strive to increase Islamic countries' share in the world economy...galvanise their resources to deal with one another. The summit could generate economic cooperation among member countries, taking stock of the interest of more than one billion Muslims in the world," he said.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in summarising Malaysia's expectations of the summit, said the OIC should give attention to economic matters such as boosting trade and investments which are crucial for the development of Muslims.

Dr Mahathir had said in the last summit in Casablanca that Muslim countries could have done more and have a stronger voice in world affairs if they were united and more cohesive.

Shahidi said economic cooperation between Iran and Malaysia could be a model for the other Muslim countries.

He cited the involvement of Petronas, Malaysia's national oil corporation, in a tripartite consortium to develop Iran's Southern Pars Gas Field as something that benefited both countries.

"This is a free world...we can trade with anybody," he said by way of commenting on a United States law that penalises firms investing more than US\$20 million a year in Iran's oil and gas sector.

French energy giant Total SA led the consortium that signed a US\$2 billion gas development deal with Iran in September. The other consortium partner is Russia's Gazprom. -- BERNAMA

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