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PM: Attendance at G-15 summit could be better

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the attendance of leaders to the Seventh G-15 Summit "could be better" despite there being a quorum for the meeting which begins today.

Dr Mahathir will be chairing the meeting, which will be attended by Algerian president Liamine Zeroul, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, Indonesian president Suharto, Peruvian president Mr Alberto Fujimori, Zimbabwe president Mr Robert Mugabe, Argentinian vice-president Dr Carlos Ruckauf, Indian vice-president Krishnan Kant and Jamaican deputy prime minister Mr Seymour Mullings.

Brazil will be represented by its external relations minister Mr Lampreia Luis Felipe, Mexico by its foreign minister Mr Jose Angel Gurria Trevino and Chile by its economic minister Alvaro Garcia Hurtado.

Kenya, which will be admitted as the 16th member at this summit, will be represented by its Minister in the President's Office and Regional Co-operation, Nicholas Biwott.

The Summit needs a quorum of eight leaders to take effect.

Asked by reporters in Kuala Lumpur on the eve of the summit yesterday if this reflected the lack of commitment among G-15 leaders to attend the summit, Dr Mahathir said: "They may have some important commitments."

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, speaking to reporters after briefing Dr Mahathir on the outcome of the G-15 Foreign Ministers' meeting on Saturday, said: "We had hope to get more leaders to come but because of some difficulties ...

"For example, the Jamaican prime minister is facing an election ... we can't expect him to come. We can understand that.

"Some leaders in South America are having their Iberian summit. Since they are actively involved in the summit, they couldn't come.

"One of the issues that we (the foreign ministers) brought before the prime minister at our meeting is that perhaps we can find a more suitable date and not towards the last quarter of the year.

"We noticed that the South American leaders are busy with many meetings in the last quarter of the year. Many South American and African countries also hold elections during that time of the year.

"Perhaps, if we can bring the date forward ... this is a matter for the heads to decide. They know best when the summit can be held," he added.

Abdullah said as far as Malaysia is concerned, it does not have problems as to when the summit is held or how often it is organised.

The G-15 foreign ministers had on Saturday deliberated at length the related issue of how frequent the Summit should be held. But they could not decide whether to support a proposal to have biennial summits or maintain the present annual meets.

The foreign ministers decided that the matter should be best left to the leaders who will deal with other pressing issues like the question of membership, and the need for the grouping to raise its profile internationally.

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