

30 AUG 1998
NAM-Mahathir
ABDULLAH TO REPRESENT DR MAHATHIR AT NAM SUMMIT

DURBAN, Aug 30 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is confident that the South African government will understand Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's decision not to attend the 12th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit here beginning Wednesday.

Foreign Ministry Deputy Secretary-General Datuk N. Parameswaran said Kuala Lumpur hoped that as the host of the summit, Pretoria would accept Dr Mahathir's decision.

"It should be accepted," he told Malaysian journalists at a briefing on the two-day NAM senior officials meeting which began in this South African port city today.

The prime minister said in Kuala Lumpur yesterday that he was unable to attend the summit because he was tired after a nationwide tour to explain to the people about the country's financial and economic problems.

Parameswaran said NAM member countries accepted the fact that there could be situations like this.

He said there were other NAM leaders who had cancelled their participation in short notice such as Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed.

"The prime minister has made all the preparations to come to South Africa. He was here recently. We have a very strong relations with South Africa," he said.

Parameswaran said there had been no negative reaction to Dr Mahathir's decision not to attend the summit.

He said Dr Mahathir had informed South African President Nelson Mandela that Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi would lead the Malaysian delegation to the Durban Summit.

The prime minister had informed this to Mandela in a letter which was delivered by Malaysia's High Commissioner in Pretoria Datuk Abdul Kadir Din to the South African Foreign Ministry, he said.

"So, for all purposes, he (Abdullah) will represent Malaysia (at the summit)," Parameswaran said.

He said Abdullah, who is due to arrive here today, would deliver the prime minister's speech at the summit.

Dr Mahathir's much-awaited speech is expected to centre on the financial and economic crisis.

The two-day summit will be attended by more than 40 heads of state and government. Formally launched in 1961, NAM consists of 113 developing nations.

On today's meeting, Parameswaran said the senior officials agreed to recommend the admission of Belarus as the movement's 114th member.

On nuclear disarmament, he said India, Pakistan and South Africa would formulate a text on the issue to be included in the final document of the summit.

Parameswaran also said Sudan had served a notice that it would propose that the summit discuss the recent rocket attack against alleged terrorist bases in Sudan by the United States.

On the Asian financial crisis, he said it would remain an important issue despite reports that it would take a back seat in light of the recent bomb blasts in several African countries.

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