

04/03/1998

British Minister of State to meet Dr M over region's woes

Joseph Binkasan in London

BRITISH Minister of State Derek Fatchett will meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad this week to discuss the possibility of creating new initiatives to solve the financial problems in Southeast Asia.

Fatchett, who left on Monday for a four-country tour as British Prime Minister Tony Blair's special representative, is leading a high-powered British Government team.

He told a Press conference at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office here on Monday that he will also meet Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Fatchett left for Bangkok before proceeding to Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. He is also the special representative of Britain's presidency of the European Union during his meeting with Government leaders of the four Asean member countries.

The visit is also a mission for Fatchett to meet leaders of the Governments of Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia to discuss matters that will be deliberated at the forthcoming Asia Europe Meeting.

Dr Mahathir will be among the Asian heads of Government attending the two-day meeting beginning April 2 at the Queen Elizabeth 2 Conference Centre here. Asian countries attending are Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Japan and Korea. Europe will be represented by the countries of the European Union.

Fatchett said he hoped not only to bring messages from the European Union in connection with the financial problems to Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia but also to listen to strategies taken by leaders of the four countries to tackle the problem.

"I will report the outcome of this visit to the European Union Foreign Ministers meeting in Edinburgh on March 13. The report will be tabled at the Asem 2 summit."

Meanwhile, the third Asia Europe Business Forum will be held at the Brewery Conference Centre here on April 2 and 3.

The forum brings together senior industrialists, financiers and Government officials from all the Asem countries to discuss measures to improve and increase business between the two regions.

The forum will aim to increase the role of the private sector in determining and strengthening Asia-Europe economic links and identify key issues and obstacles facing trade and investment.

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