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Mahathir-Bangladesh

BANGLADESH AWAITS MAHATHIR AT SECOND D-8 SUMMIT

By: Shafiqul Bashar

DHAKA, Feb 19 (Bernama) -- A warm welcome awaits Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he arrives here to attend the second summit of the group of eight Islamic developing countries (D-8) scheduled for March 1 and 2.

"The government and the people of this country are looking forward with much enthusiasm to greet Dr Mahathir, a very close friend of Bangladesh," said Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad.

This would be Dr Mahathir's third visit to Bangladesh. His first official visit was in 1983 and the second in 1993.

Abdus Samad told Bernama in an interview here today that Dr Mahathir is a highly respected personality in this country, especially because of his friendly and brotherly feeling for the people of Bangladesh.

For instance, he said Dr Mahathir responded positively when Dhaka requested him to consider the plight of Bangladeshi illegal workers in Malaysia.

"He was quite sympathetic and 150,000 Bangladeshi workers who were illegal workers in Malaysia were legalised in 1996," he said.

Set up on June 15, 1997 at its first summit in Istanbul in 1997, the D-8 aims to;

- * improve the position of developing Islamic countries in the world economy;
 - * diversify and create new opportunities in trade ties;
 - * enhance participation in decision-making at the international level;
- and
- * strive towards providing better living standards.

Abdus Samad also said that Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur have been maintaining close bilateral trade and investment cooperation for which there was scope for expansion.

A number of Malaysian entrepreneurs have invested in Bangladesh and he hoped "more will come."

Meanwhile, preparations for the D-8 summit were almost complete and Dhaka is ready to welcome the leaders and officials.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman here said that four heads of state and government have confirmed attendance at the D-8 summit, including Dr Mahathir.

The others are President BJ Habibie of Indonesia, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan and President Suleyman Demirel of Turkey.

First Vice President Dr Hassan Habibi would represent Iran while the foreign ministers of Egypt and Nigeria are expected to lead their countries' delegations.

The D-8 comprises Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.

The heads of state and government would start arriving in Dhaka from Feb 28.

The summit will be preceded by meetings of the Council of Ministers (foreign ministers of member countries) and Commissioners (senior officials) on Feb 25 and 26.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed will inaugurate the two-day summit on March 1 at the newly-constructed conference centre at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

The conference is expected to adopt the Dhaka Declaration on March 2.

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