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Dr M arrives in Dhaka, D-8 set to stress cooperation

Lokman Mansor in Dhaka

DHAKA, Sun: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here this afternoon as foreign ministers of the Developing Eight (D-8) finalised a draft communique that will stress further economic cooperation.

Dr Mahathir is expected to address the second summit of the D-8 which opens tomorrow afternoon, possibly with only half the grouping's leaders attending.

Besides Dr Mahathir and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the other two leaders who have confirmed coming for the two-day summit are Turkish President Suleyman Damirel and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

The D-8 was established on June 15 1997 in Istanbul, Turkey, at the first summit of the heads of state and government of eight Muslim countries - Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.

The Council of Ministers, comprising foreign ministers from the eight countries, has meanwhile finalised the draft of the Dhaka Declaration which is expected to focus on further cooperation in trade and economic matters at meetings preceding the summit.

Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar's counterparts in the Council of Ministers this time are Egypt's Foreign Minister Amre M. Moussa, Indonesia's Ali Alatas, Iran's Kamal Kharrazi, Pakistan's Sartaj Aziz, and Bangladesh's Abdus Samad Azad. Turkey and Nigeria were represented by senior officials.

At the summit, Iran will be represented by its First Vice President Dr Hassan Habibi, the first leader to arrive today. Indonesian Minister for People's Welfare and Poverty Eradication Haryono Suyono and the Egyptian Foreign Minister will lead their countries' delegations at the summit.

Nawaz will arrive tomorrow while Nigeria, which is in the midst of elections, has not confirmed its representative at the summit.

Dr Mahathir, who was met at the airport by Sheikh Hasina, Syed Hamid and Malaysian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Datuk Zulkifly Ab Rahman, will join the other heads of state and government at a wreath-laying ceremony at Savar Smriti Shoudha, a striking 50-metre high memorial for the millions who died in Bangladesh's struggle for Independence in 1971.

This will be followed in the afternoon with the first session of the D-8 Summit, during which the chairpersons of the first and second D-8 summits, and the heads of country delegations will address the meeting.

Tomorrow night the heads of delegations will attend a banquet hosted by Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, president of Bangladesh.

On Tuesday, the leaders will hold a retreat before the concluding session of the Summit, and the reading of the Dhaka Declaration. In the evening, Sheikh Hasina will host a dinner for them.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) has urged D-8 states to take steps to expand economic cooperation. In a press release, BCI president Sharif M. Afzal Hossain said economic development can help alleviate poverty, reduce unemployment and illiteracy, spur innovation of technology and expand trade and investment.

"If these eight development aspiring countries go on working together sincerely they will be able to achieve economic emancipation and strengthen their position to face the forthcoming economic challenge of

the 21st century and globalisation," he said.
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