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Castro invites PM to Havana for G-77 meet

Eirmalasare Bani

CUBAN President Fidel Castro has invited Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Havana in April for the G-77 Summit.

Mr Miguel Ramirez Ramos, Castro's special envoy, extended his President's invitation to the Prime Minister when he met Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The grouping of 77 developing nations will be meeting from April 11 to 14 this year.

Syed Hamid, speaking to reporters after meeting Ramos, said Castro had requested Dr Mahathir's attendance to the summit as the President feels that the Prime Minister "will give a meaningful and effective presence at the Summit".

"This is because Dr Mahathir is well-known for his strong support and commitment in the development of South-South countries which comprise small and developing African and South American nations," Syed Hamid said.

Syed Hamid said he will forward the invitation to Dr Mahathir.

Issues to be discussed at the Summit include the impact of globalisation on South-South countries and how the developing nations can play a more important role at the United Nations special assembly in New York this September.

"Malaysia considers South-South cooperation as a very important forum for developing nations to express their views and agenda for action.

"We hope the summit will be successful, bearing in mind the failure of the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle," Syed Hamid said.

Asked whether Dr Mahathir was invited to address the summit, Syed Hamid said as the head of one of the 77 governments, the Prime Minister will obviously be asked to deliver a speech in Havana.

Diplomatic relationship between Malaysia and Cuba began in 1975 but the Cuban Embassy was only set up in Kuala Lumpur in September 1997 following Dr Mahathir's visit to the country earlier in the same month.

The visit was part of Dr Mahathir's 11-day South American tour which included Chile, Uruguay and Argentina. Syed Hamid said he was also briefed by Ramos on the custody dispute over a six-year-old Cuban boy, a shipwreck survivor of a group which attempted to reach the US.

He said the Cuban Foreign Ministry had recently sent a letter requesting Malaysia's support for the boy to be sent home to Cuba. "I have responded to the letter saying that we support the position of international laws and conventions," he said.

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