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Dr M slated to be first speaker at Unctad meet

Eirmalasare Bani

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is slated to be the first speaker to address the 10th United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad-10) in Bangkok today.

Dr Mahathir's keynote address is expected to focus the trade liberalisation and globalisation process, the need for a new financial architecture, and other issues that directly affect Malaysia.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Prime Minister is also scheduled to attend two meetings that will be held in conjunction with Unctad-10. They are the Asean-United Nations Summit and Asean-Japan Summit.

"In view of the failure of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in Seattle, this is an opportunity for countries under Unctad to discuss issues related to trade and development," he told reporters after presenting the ministry's excellent service awards in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Unctad-10 is the first major multilateral meeting since the WTO ministerial meeting last November where proceedings in the conference hall were overshadowed by violent protests in the streets.

Malaysia will be represented by Deputy International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Dr Kerk Choo Ting in the Unctad-10 discussions.

About 3,000 ministers, senior government officials and representatives of international agencies and non-governmental organisations are expected to attend the meeting.

Syed Hamid said the Asean-UN Summit will be attended by all Heads of Government in Asean, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan and director-generals of UN agencies.

"It will be a roundtable meeting to discuss, among other things, the roles of Asean and UN in the new millennium," he said.

Asked whether bilateral discussions will be held as well, Syed Hamid said: "Maybe, but the programmes have yet to be finalised. Sideline meetings will be arranged when and if requested or needed. The existing schedule is already quite packed."

On whether Malaysia has specific issues to raise, he said this will be the thrust of the Prime Minister's speech.

"We need to discuss the role of Asean, how we could play a greater role in order to influence the globalisation process which is unstoppable... how to create a new economic regime that will take into account the interests of developing countries.

"The issues include political and regional security and development, on which Dr Mahathir will lead the discussions."

Earlier in his speech, Syed Hamid said it is important that Malaysia clearly state its position on globalisation, trade liberalisation, good governance and humanitarian issues to prevent some parties from using them to interfere in the country's domestic affairs.

He presented excellence awards to 44 ministry officials, among whom was West Asia, Africa and Organisation of Islamic Countries under-secretary Datuk Ahmad Mokhtar Selat.

Ahmad Mokhtar is the former Malaysian ambassador to Peru who was held hostage with other envoys by the Tupac Amaru terrorist group at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima in September 1996.

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