

Mahathir to deliver keynote address at economic forum

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HONG KONG: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will deliver the keynote address at a two-day meeting beginning on Feb 26 to launch the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) in Hainan, China.

The invitation to the Prime Minister to address the meeting was made in view of his being an elder statesman in the East Asia region and strong exponent of regional co-operation in Asia, said BFA pro tem sec-

retary-general Tan Sri Ajit Singh.

Some 200 delegates, including former heads of government and other former senior political leaders, senior Chinese leaders and several current leaders from other countries, corporate leaders and representatives from 25 Asian nations would attend the meeting.

The forum, a non-political, non-government entity patterned on the annual World Economic Forum, had received wide support, said Ajit.

The idea behind the setting up of

the BFA is to have a venue where global economic and development issues can be discussed in an Asian setting.

"It will provide, for the first time, opportunities for representatives from across Asia to sit together with the objective of promoting greater interdependence and economic integration in the region through trade, investment and technical co-operation," Ajit said at a news conference.

The BFA is open to all non-governmental agencies, corporations and

business enterprises based in Asia.

Permanent host facilities for the forum have been provided by the Chinese government and the Chinese private sector.

The BFA's activities would be financed from corporate contributions and convention fees.

Its secretariat would be headed by a secretary-general aided by an advisory council comprising former national leaders, corporate representatives and eminent scholars.

The notion of an Asian forum was

first advanced at a meeting of Asian leaders in Manila during the height of the financial crisis in 1998.

This was followed up with an informal gathering in Boao of experts from countries in Asean, East, Central and South Asia, and Australia last November.

Ajit said the inaugural meeting would adopt a draft declaration which was hammered out at that gathering, setting out BFA's objective, mission statement and strategies.