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Forum-Mahathir

MAHATHIR, WORLD LEADERS TO ADDRESS WEF ANNUAL MEETING

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 18 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be among several world leaders to address the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting this year which organisers said will contribute to shaping a new vision for the global agenda after the Sept 11 attacks on the United States.

The meeting will be held in New York from Jan 31 to Feb 4, the first time it is hosted outside Davos in the 31-year-old history of the Geneva-based influential foundation.

"We are bringing together an extraordinary collection of people, in extraordinary times. This could truly be an annual meeting that makes history," WEF president Kalus Schwab said in a statement today.

"We created a brand new programme for this annual meeting...a programme designed to stimulate discussion and provide insights that will help us better cope with the fragility of our times."

Nearly 3,000 participants, with record attendance from both the business and civil society groups, are expected to turn up at the five-day conference which carries the theme "Leadership in Fragile times: A Vision for a Shared Future".

Other leaders expected at the meeting include German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien, South African President Thabo Mbeki, Jordan's King Abdullah Hussein, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Colombian President Andres Pastrana, Austrian President Thomas Klestil, US Secretary of State Colin Powell and former US President Bill Clinton.

Forty-three religious leaders, representing all major faiths, will also be participating.

The WEF said the gathering was moved to New York to signal its determination to tackle head on the challenges faced by the world after Sept 11 when two hijacked commercial planes were deliberately crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center there.

"When we began planning this meeting in the aftermath of 11 Sept and in the midst of the anthrax scare in New York, we could have hardly imagined the level of participation we're looking at today. It's clear our members feel that this meeting is both necessary and important at this time," said Donna Redel, the managing director who heads WEF's centre for global industries.

The meeting will focus on six areas - restoring sustained growth, achieving security and address vulnerabilities, redefining business challenges, reducing poverty and achieving equity, sharing values and respective differences, and re-evaluating leadership and governance.

Malaysia will also be hosting the WEF East Asia summit for the first time on Oct 6-8.

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