

19 AUG 2003

Mahathir-OIC

ALGERIAN AND SYRIAN PRESIDENTS TO ATTEND OIC SUMMIT

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 19 (Bernama) -- Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Syrian President Dr Bashar Al-Assad will attend the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit to be hosted by Malaysia in October.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today they expressed their intention to attend the summit at their meetings with him during his visit to the two countries.

"President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and President Bashar Al-Assad told me that they would be attending the OIC Summit," he told a media conference at the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) base in Subang, near here, upon his return after visiting Algeria, Syria and Swaziland.

In Swaziland, he attended the Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID).

The 10th OIC Summit will be held in Putrajaya from Oct 11 to 18.

Asked whether Malaysia would be inviting countries or heads of government outside the OIC, like United States President George W. Bush, for dialogues with the Islamic leaders on the sidelines of the summit, Dr Mahathir said: "No, I don't think so, but if anyone wants to come (for the summit) and if they don't violate our rules, we will welcome them."

Asked whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would attend the summit as an observer following Russia's interest in joining the OIC either as a member or observer, he said he did not know whether an invitation had been issued.

He said invitations to countries outside the OIC were handled by the OIC secretariat.

"I don't know yet. This is a matter for the OIC secretariat. There's no OIC secretariat here yet. If they want to invite, we will accept," he said.

To a question on Syria wanting Malaysia to play a prominent role in uniting the Muslim nations, Dr Mahathir said it was not only Syria that wanted Malaysia to play such a role but other people had expressed the same opinion.

"We will... we can," he said.

Asked on foreign leaders' calls to him to continue playing a role in helping the developing countries and uniting Muslims of the world even after his retirement, he said there had been many such calls.

"Some people have said that I should not retire too early and that even if I retire, I must contribute to the Muslim community and so forth," he said.

However, he said he would stand by his decision to retire.

"I will retire and I have said that I will help in whatever way I can. I will also help the party and if invited to help out in other matters, I will try my best to do so," he said.

Dr Mahathir had announced that he would relinquish all his government and party posts after the OIC Summit and had named Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his successor.

-- BERNAMA

HS NER AHH JK