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NAM-Timor Leste

KL TO WITNESS ENTRY OF TIMOR LESTE AS NAM'S 115TH MEMBER

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 6 (Bernama) -- The 40-year-old Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) will grow into a 115-member grouping of developing countries come Feb 24 with the acceptance of Timor Leste into its fold.

"Timor Leste will be joining NAM as a full member on the first day of the summit," said Foreign Ministry Secretary General Datuk Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak today.

The country's entry into NAM would be endorsed on Feb 24 by the NAM heads of state/government right after a proposal was made for its membership, he told Bernama.

Timor Leste, a former Portugese colony which integrated with Indonesia in 1975 and later decided to split through a United Nations' ballot in August 1999, celebrated its first independence on May 20, last year.

Ahmad Fuzi said that President Xanana Gusmao is scheduled to lead Timor Leste's delegation to the 13th NAM Summit, joining the other 52 heads of state/government of NAM who have confirmed their attendance for the two-day summit.

However, he said that for security reasons, Wisma Putra could not name the leaders.

"It is not appropriate to give their names but possibly we will announce their names as we get closer to the summit," he said.

"Of the 52, 49 have confirmed their attendace in writing and another three did so verbally," he said.

At 52, the Kuala Lumpur gathering will see the highest number of NAM leaders' attendance in 12 years as the ninth NAM Summit in Belgrade in 1989 saw the participation of 48 leaders.

The eighth NAM Summit in Harare in 1986 was also attended by 48 leaders while the highest number of NAM Summit attendance was at 58, a record jointly held by New Delhi in 1983 (the seventh NAM Summit) and Algiers in 1973 (the fourth NAM Summit).

Ahmad Fuzi said that the confirmed attendance to date was quite commendable on the back of the Iraq conflict, an event that has never affected the movement's members.

In West Asia, tension is rising as the United States continuously sends signal of its impending attack against Iraq.

"We have another two weeks to go before the KL summit. We hope to get more confirmation and to be able to overtake the New Delhi and Algiers record.

"Of course as a host, our expectation is to get full participation and attendance of all NAM member countries," he said.

Ahmad Fuzi disclosed that on last count, 70 heads of delegation would attend the Kuala Lumpur NAM meeting which starts with the meeting of senior officials on Feb 20 and 21, ministerial level meeting on Feb 22 and followed by the leaders' summit.

The heads of delegation could be represented by heads of state/government, deputy prime ministers or vice presidents, foreign ministers, senior officials or ambassadors.

"With the inclusion of verbal confirmation, there are 84 heads of delegation and 14 spouses coming to the meeting, which is a very good figure," he added.

Kuala Lumpur's efforts in inviting NAM leaders to the 13th Summit was done right from the ambassadors up to the cabinet ministers.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar extended invitations when they attended international conferences and made official visits overseas.

This was complemented by the efforts of six cabinet ministers who were appointed as special envoys to hand over letters and official invitations from the Prime Minister to the leaders of the least developed NAM countries.

The ministers are Ministers in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Bernard Dompok and Datuk Seri Rais Yatim, Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, Rural Development Minister Datuk Adzmi Khalid and National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Seri Zaharah Sulaiman.

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