

24 FEB 2003

NAM LEADERS MAKE A BEELINE TO MEET MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the newly appointed chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), had his hands full today holding bilateral meetings with 11 leaders apart from keeping tabs on the ongoing 13th NAM summit here.

Dr Mahathir attended the opening ceremony of the summit at the Putra World Trade Centre here this morning and chaired the meeting until 3pm before leaving for the bilateral meetings in an adjacent room.

First to meet him was Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf followed by Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Bahrain's Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa Salman Al-Khalifa, Timor Leste President Xanana Gusmao and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

He then held talks with Afgan President Hamid Karzai, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Vietnamese President Tran Duc Luong, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Prime Minister Rafic Hariri of Lebanon.

Dr Mahathir's bilateral talks for the day ended with a meeting with North Korea's President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, Kim Yong Nam.

Soon after the meetings, which lasted about 20 minutes each, Dr Mahathir rushed back to the summit hall to continue his duty of chairing the gathering.

He will host a dinner tonight for the leaders at the Palace of the Golden Horses in Seri Kembangan on the outskirts of the capital.

-- BERNAMA

AZH SR MAM JK