

08 JAN 2003  
APPF-Format  
NEW FORMAT AT 11TH APPF MEETING

By: Abdul Aziz Harun

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 8 (Bernama) -- The 11th Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF) meeting to be held here next week will display a different format to enable the 150 delegates from 27 member countries to express their views on world issues in a more informal environment.

As the host country, Malaysia has been given the task to make the annual APPF meeting more lively and fruitful to maintain its relevance.

The three-day meeting which begins on Monday is scheduled to be opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The APPF is a non-exclusive forum of national parliamentarians founded by former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1991. The parliamentarians participate either as delegates of their parliaments or in their personal capacity.

Senate President Tan Sri Michael Chen Wing Sum, appointed automatically as the APPF chairman, said that unlike the previous meetings where speakers were planned earlier to talk on specific subjects, this time all countries would be given a chance to address the session.

"However, due to time constraint, only one representative from each country will be allowed to speak. If there's enough time, then it will be up to the chairman to open the floor to other participants to present their points of view," he told Bernama here today.

"Parliamentarians, being experienced people in their respective parliaments, like to participate in addressing issues straight away, so the need to discuss them more freely," he said.

Chen said that at last year's APPF meeting in Honolulu, they proposed that to make the APPF more effective, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) secretariat should take the initiative to include resolutions adopted by the APPF in its agenda.

While the Apec, formed in 1989, stresses more on economic cooperation, the APPF acts as its legislative branch and more of a loosely-structured and non-exclusive forum of national parliamentarians.

Chen said that even though the APPF consists of only 27 countries, the fact that the United States, Russia and China, three of the five UN Security Council members, were among the participants, it was a reason that makes the Forum very significant.

He pointed out that the 27 member countries -- Australia, Cambodia, Canada, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Chile, China, Colombia, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Micronesia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, the US and Vietnam -- represented about one third of the world population.

He said that as most parliamentarians have a great influence on their respective leaders, their points of view would definitely be considered positively by them.

Chen said that he was happy to note that this year's meeting would see a full turnout compared to the previous meeting, where 24 member countries took part, despite some negative media reports about the safety of the region.

He said that the number of participants was important to show to the world that such an allegation was ridiculous.

"Their attendance in fact is a testimony of their confidence in the security of our country. The US is expected to send about 13 delegates, the

highest number of delegates, while Australia six," he said.

He said that the secretariat had also arranged guided tours for the parliamentarians to places like Putrajaya and Melaka to show them the prosperity and development that the multiracial society here enjoys.

"Sometimes discussions alone may not be so fruitful unless you bring them to the ground to see for themselves, to give the new dimension in their mind about the country or society that they only know through the media," he said.

Chen said that the fact that Dr Mahathir is scheduled to open the meeting is also believed to be one of the reasons for the overwhelming participation.

"Over the years, many parliamentarians have voiced their admiration for the prime minister's charisma and I heard many of them are looking forward to meeting him in person during the APPF meeting," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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