

16 OCT 2003

OIC-Putin

PUTIN THANKS HOST MALAYSIA FOR INVITATION TO OIC SUMMIT

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 16 (Bernama) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin marked his historic presence at the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit here with a speech envisaging closer cooperation between his country and the OIC.

He said he was grateful to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is the summit chairman, for inviting him to the opening ceremony of the largest gathering of Muslim leaders at the Putrajaya Convention Centre here.

Welcoming the leaders in his address to the summit, Dr Mahathir said whether they were Muslims or not, their presence at the meeting would help towards greater understanding of Islam and the Muslims, thus helping to disprove the perception of Islam as a religion of backwardness and terror.

Apart from Putin, Dr Mahathir had invited Philippine President Gloria Arroyo and Sri Lanka which was represented by its Minister of Port Development and Shipping, Eastern Development and Muslim Religious Affairs Rauf Hakeem.

The summit, the first to be held in the Asia Pacific region, has drawn 33 Muslim leaders, the largest number since the inception of the 57-member OIC in 1969. The other members sent their respective representatives.

Putin arrived at the KL International Airport at 5am today specifically to attend the opening session of the summit and hold bilateral talks with Dr Mahathir.

Speaking in Russian, Putin highlighted the development of the Muslim community in Russia, which is reported to be about 20 million-strong.

He said that from 870 mosques in 1991, there were now more than 7,000 mosques in Russia.

Dr Mahathir, during a trip to Russia last year, had the opportunity to perform Friday prayers at Moscow's biggest mosque and meet Muslim leaders there.

Putin also touched on the threats of terrorism, saying that terrorism must not be identified with any religion, cultural tradition or way of life.

"I would like to state to you all: for citizens of our country, Russian Muslims are an integral part of the multi-ethnic people of Russia.

"And we see the strength of our country in this inter-religious harmony. We see its worth, wealth and benefit," said Putin.

He said that Moscow's cooperation in the framework of the OIC might become an important element of a just and safe world, capable of solving many international and religious problems without conflict.

"The combination of our financial, technological and personnel resources is capable of becoming a real factor in international politics, the beginning of a breakthrough in many areas of the world economy," he said.

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