

17 FEB 2003

NAM-Mahathir (Rehearsal)

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT FOR NAM SUMMIT OPENING CEREMONY, SAYS DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 17 (Bernama) -- With just three days to go for the 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit, a colourful rehearsal for the opening ceremony was held today at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC), the summit venue.

The dry-run included the movement of cars carrying the 114 NAM "leaders" from their hotels to the PWTC and the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, receiving the "leaders."

City dwellers had to put up with the closure of several roads leading to the PWTC from 8am to 9.30am to allow for the smooth movement of the VVIP motorcades.

Speaking at a media conference later, Dr Mahathir expressed satisfaction over the rehearsal.

He said although everything went according to schedule, there was still a need to do more practice.

"There are minor things that need to be fine-tuned. I've given my comments. On the whole, I think everything is in order but they need to do more practice," he said.

On whether he was satisfied with the movement of motorcades, Dr Mahathir said they were exactly on time.

"I did not see the movement of the 114 motorcades on the road. They were exactly on time and we finished exactly as planned," he said.

Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, arrived for the rehearsal at 8.30am and were ushered to the Holding Lounge where he received the "leaders".

Wisma Putra officials had the pleasant task of acting as NAM leaders and had the opportunity to shake hands with Dr Mahathir before entering the well-decorated lounge as photographers clicked away on their cameras.

Present were Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, his deputy Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad, Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Datuk Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak and other senior officials.

After the 90-minute arrival of "leaders" and welcoming ceremony replete with traditionally-clad group of women holding "sirih junjung" and "bunga telur", Dr Mahathir and the "leaders" were escorted to the cavernous Dewan Merdeka where the opening ceremony will take place on Monday.

There, Dr Mahathir and several others went through speeches to be delivered at the event.

Accompanied by a choir, a recording of the NAM theme song titled "NAM Shall Lead the Way" composed by Datuk Ahmad Nawab and sung by evergreen pop singer Khatijah Ibrahim was also played.

The opening ceremony dry-run lasted for about four hours.

-- BERNAMA

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