

09 JUL 2004
Goh-India
GOH BEGINS THREE-DAY VISIT TO INDIA

SINGAPORE, July 9 (Bernama) -- Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong is now on a state visit to India, the first by a foreign head of government since the election of Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh in May.

The three-day trip will be followed by his first visit to Iran, starting on Sunday, at the invitation of President Mohammad Khatami.

In India, Goh will hold discussions with President A.P. J. Abdul Kalam, Dr Manmohan Singh, Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh and Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath.

Also scheduled are talks with ruling Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi, Opposition leader L.K. Advani and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Goh will also be conferred the 2003 Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding by President Abdul Kalam at a ceremony today, a statement from the Prime Minister's Office said.

Recipients of the award -- instituted in memory of India's first premier -- include South Africa's former president Nelson Mandela and Malaysia's former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Goh, who last visited India in April last year, is accompanied by Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar, Trade and Industry Minister George Yeo Yong Boon and senior officials.

After his three-day visit, Goh then heads to Iran, making the first visit by a Singapore Prime Minister since 1975, when then-PM Lee Kuan Yew was there.

In Iran, Goh will call on Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and hold meetings with President Mohammad Khatami, Majlis (Parliament) Speaker Gholamali Haddad-Adel, and former President Akbar Hasemi Rafsanjani, who now chairs the country's Expediency Council which handles disputes between elected officials and appointed clergy.

Jayakumar, Commerce Development and Sports Minister Dr Yaacob Ibrahim and Minister of State for Trade and Industry Raymond Lim will be

part of
the delegation to Iran.

The Prime Minister's Office said that during his absence, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will be Acting Prime Minister from July 8 to July 9 and from July 14 to July 15. Second Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Security and Defence Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam will be the Acting Prime Minister from July 10 to July 13.

-- BERNAMA

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