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Arafat thanks Dr Mahathir, Malaysians for support

PALESTINIAN President Yasser Arafat has prepared a message of gratitude to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Malaysian Government for their efforts in trying to get him to attend the 13th Non-Aligned Movement Summit.

Palestinian Foreign Minister and head of delegation to the summit Farouk Kaddumi said yesterday the message would be delivered to Dr Mahathir should Arafat fail to make it to Kuala Lumpur.

"I've also been asked to convey to Dr Mahathir his (Arafat's) best wishes and regards and gratitude for the support we've received from the Government and the Malaysian people," he told Bernama.

Arafat is caught in a very difficult situation as no one can guarantee his safe return to Palestine if he decides to come here.

However, Kaddumi said, the Palestinian leader was not giving up on attending the summit of NAM leaders, scheduled for tomorrow and Tuesday.

Meanwhile, most of the NAM foreign ministers checked in on Friday night. They included Singapore's S. Jayakumar, Fayza Aboul Naga (Egypt), Prince Mohamed Bolkiah (Brunei), Yashwant Singha (India), Dr Najji Sabri (Iraq) and Marwan Muasher of Jordan.

The Foreign Minister of Timor Leste, Jose Ramos Horta, also arrived on Friday night. That country, along with Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, is set to join NAM at the Kuala Lumpur summit.