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Dr M to focus on issue of trust at WEF plenary session

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad got down to business as soon as he arrived in Davos yesterday to attend the annual World Economic Forum (WEF).

He is accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Ali and several senior government officials.

Dr Mahathir will speak at the opening plenary session on "Trust and Governance for a New Era", kicking off the annual forum at the ski resort town in the Swiss Alps with its focus on trust, terrorism, Islam and globalisation.

He is scheduled to speak on "How the fight against terrorism will change the world" during a session to be chaired by US Attorney-General, John Ashcroft.

The other panelists will include Colombia President Alvaro Uribe Velez and Kumi Naidoo, secretary-general and CEO of Civicus-World Alliance for Citizen Participation, South Africa.

The focus on conflict will be further discussed during the panel session on "Driver of Conflict: Political Islam and its Discontent".

The brief of the session acknowledges that "Islam has been politicised by some and used as a tool to express discontent".

The session will consider the correlation between political Islam and instability, the international community's role to stabilise the region, the impact of political Islam on some strategic but fragile states, and whether political Islam can become a democratising force.

Security has been stepped up and according to some, the organisers have put "missiles in the sky and taken the guns off the streets".

The security budget has increased to 13.5 million Swiss francs (RM38 million) compared with 8.6 million Swiss francs in 2001, the last time the forum was held in Davos.

In 2002, it was held in New York in support and sympathy for the Sept 11 attacks.

The Swiss authorities are not taking any chances as the perceived threat to the six-day event appears to have shifted from "anti-globalisation protesters" to "terrorists".

According to Klaus Schwab, founder and president of WEF, the focus on terrorists is simple - participants head businesses worth trillions of US dollars and oversee a large chunk of the world economy.

Participants range from former US President Bill Clinton, US Secretary of State Colin Powell, to Microsoft founder Bill Gates.