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Commonwealth heads to focus on climate change

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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, accompanied by Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, being greeted on arrival at Port of Spain in Trinidad and Tobago by the country's Minister of Social Development Amery Brown yesterday.

A SEPARATE communique on climate change is expected to be issued at the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting beginning here in the capital city of Trinidad and Tobago today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak arrived here from Washington on Thursday morning to lead the Malaysian delegation for the three-day meeting, which promises to be one of the most important Commonwealth meetings ever. Accompanying him is Foreign Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman.

Climate change will be the main topic of discussion among the leaders of the 53 countries in the grouping.

The biennial summit is themed "Partnering for a more Equitable and Sustainable Future". This year's meeting will also coincide with the 60th anniversary of the Commonwealth.

Its secretary-general, Kamallesh Sharma, expects leaders to embrace the issue of climate change as the meeting offers the only opportunity for the leaders to meet before the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change next month.

Leaders will meet today for a special four-hour session on climate change after the opening ceremony by Queen Elizabeth.

Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who are strong environmental advocates, will be the Commonwealth's special guests at the special session. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has also confirmed his attendance.

Nothing is expected to take precedence over the issue of cli-

mate change as the developing and developed countries sit on two opposite sides of the fence where this is concerned.

Commonwealth officials acknowledged that no one country can tackle these issues alone. As such, emphasis will be on adopting an integrated approach to find joint solutions.

There is, however, fear among leaders that the climate change issue may be overshadowed by other issues.

An official said Malaysia may bring to the table a discussion on the need for reforms of current international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations in an effort to tackle the global economic crisis.

Malaysia is an active member country of the Commonwealth through the Commonwealth Fund

for Technical Co-operation (CFTC). It was established by Commonwealth leaders in 1971 to put the skills of member countries at each other's disposal.

Through CFTC, Malaysia had sent its officials as experts and consultants for technical assistance projects in other Commonwealth developing countries to facilitate transfer of knowledge and skills in technical fields. Malaysia has also hosted training at its training institutes.

There are other issues in which the host and neighbouring governments have a special interest — capacity building, human resource and skills development, the environment, protection against natural devastation, and cushioning against a variety of price shocks such as in energy and food.

And with half of the Commonwealth population of two billion

comprising those aged under 25, leaders will be looking at ways to engage the young in line with its 60th anniversary theme of "thecommonwealth@60 — serving a new generation".

Sharma has embraced the new media to reach the younger generation. The Commonwealth has asked the public to email questions about the grouping.

While here, Najib will also attend a Prime Ministers Roundtable with leaders from Malawi, Pakistan and New Zealand. He will also attend the Commonwealth Business Forum and a dinner by Sunway Group Caribbean.

This morning, Najib will attend Aidiladha prayers organised by the government here. Meanwhile, the prime minister's wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor will attend a spouses' dialogue in conjunction with the meeting.