

Malaysian diplomats preparing PM Mahathir's visit for UNGA high-level session

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NEW YORK, Sept 10 (Bernama) – Malaysian diplomats in New York are preparing an elaborate programme for the forthcoming visit of Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will also address the 73rd United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

The Malaysian Prime Minister is expected to arrive in New York in the final week of September for a three-day visit.

According to UN sources, Dr Mahathir is likely to address the UNGA on Sept 28.

The UNGA's 73rd session opens on Sept 18 with the Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces assuming the one-year presidency. She is the fourth woman to hold this position in the UNGA's history and the first since 2006.

In an interview with Bernama in his office, Malaysian permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador Datuk Shahrul Ikram Yaakob said that he and his staff were busy preparing for the Prime Minister's visit during which leaders and dignitaries from all corners of the world would descend on New York for the UN's high-level week.

New York's tight security arrangements, starting a few blocks away from the United Nations iconic headquarters building, will be rigorously enforced during the high-level week, closing entrances to traffic on many streets, including the 43rd Street where the Malaysian mission and the consulate general are located.

Signs of the security blanket that will be cast on the streets near the UN are already becoming visible and will become ubiquitous, as the high-level week comes closer.

Dr Mahathir is leading a delegation that will include the foreign minister and one or more cabinet members, along with senior staff of Wisma Putra and other ministries.

“As far as I know, Malaysia will elucidate its foreign policy goals which, I believe, will remain the same. Multilateralism, peace, security, Palestine, violent extremism, reform of institutions, etc. may be issues that could be addressed,” Shahrul Ikram said, emphasising that Malaysia attaches importance to the rule of law in the context of peace and security.

In his view, the debate over the reform of the Security Council has been going on for a long time – it is now in the Inter-Governmental Negotiations – and “we must see how this process further develops”.

Meanwhile, there is also widespread concern in the UN diplomatic circles over the financial crunch faced by the world body, with the US, which contributes some 22 per cent of the UN budget, showing impatience with the world body and questioning the budget.

The US also recently announced that it was going to stop funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). prompting Stephan Dujarric, the spokesman for the UN Secretary General, to urge other countries to fill the financial gap by stepping up assistance for Palestinian refugees.

Aside from this shortfall, many countries are slow to pay their contributions to the UN budget, creating a cash-crunch at the world body and Malaysia has been contributing regularly to the UNRWA budget.

Many leaders who arrive in New York also tend to use their presence to meet other world leaders – be it in the bilateral or multilateral context.

Dr Mahathir, who is not visiting Washington DC, is also likely to meet with his counterparts from other countries, though it is not officially known, as of now, whom he is going to meet.

There will also be leaders from countries of ASEAN, the Middle East, Europe, Africa and Latin America. The possibilities of having bilateral talks are immense, but all the leaders and dignitaries coming for the UNGA session face tremendous time constraints.

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