

Iran-Mahathir
From Mazlan Nordin

TEHERAN, Aug 13 (Bernama) -- Iran has a high regard for Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and hopes that he will make a visit to the Islamic Republic.

Speaking in a special interview here, the Minister of Islamic Guidance and Culture (Minister of Information), Dr Mohamed Khatami said: +We have respect for the government and people of Malaysia and we honour their choice of Dr Mahathir as their leader. His standing as statesman is greatly appreciated by us.

+We wish, therefore, to strengthen cooperation between our two countries in economic, social, political and cultural fields. The profound need for such close exchanges will be filled as otherwise the vacuum will be filled by others.+

Dr Khatami said there was tremendous scope for the consolidation of such ties in view of Malaysia's advance and now that Iran has +strengthened the bases of her Islamic revolution.+

Meanwhile Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Oceania, Alaidin Boroujerdi, expressed hope that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir would visit Iran. -- more

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+We in Iran recognise the Malaysian Prime Minister's standing as a leading spokesman of the Third World,+ he added.

This, he said, has again been emphasized by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's forthright statements in the recent Asean Foreign Ministers conference and the Asean Information Ministers meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Noted also was his critique of the Western media for disinformation to the detriment of developing countries.

Scheduled to visit Iran later this year are Turkish President Turgut Ozal, French President Francois Mitterand, Chinese President Yang Shangkung, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and U.N. Secretary General Perez de Cuellar.

Boroujerdi welcomed the coming visit of Deputy Prime Minister Encik Ghafar Baba to Iran as an important impetus for expansion of bilateral relations. Encik Ghafar is scheduled to make the visit at the end of this month.

Trade between Iran and Malaysia has increased from \$191.1 million in 1989 to \$246.1 million last year. -- more

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Both ministers spoke prior to the signing here of a news exchange agreement between the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) and Bernama, the 17th such agreement signed by the Malaysian news agency with other national news agencies.

Since the establishment of IRNA's bureau in Kuala Lumpur nine months ago to cover the whole of Southeast Asia, more news about Malaysia and Asean have appeared in the Iranian print and electronic media. They include statements by government and political leaders.

Meanwhile, some 600 Iranian tourists fly to Kuala Lumpur every week on the twice-weekly Iran Air flights from Teheran following the signing of a joint air services agreement between the Iranian carrier and Malaysia Airlines (MAS) in March last year.

The Malaysian Charge d'Affaires here, Encik Osman Samin described it as a welcome boost to the Malaysian tourist industry as many of the Iranian visitors go with their families, and are great spenders.

The increasing number of Iranian tourists to Malaysia has also been attributed to greater coverage of Malaysia by IRNA. Encik Osman said spontaneous praise was voiced by the ordinary man in the street about Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's statements on behalf of developing countries, and one specifically mentioned was his opening address in the Asean Foreign Ministers' conference in Kuala Lumpur last month.

Iranian President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani visited Malaysia in September 1981 when he was Speaker of the Iranian Parliament and the Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Ali Velayati last May. -- Rernama

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