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Mahathir-Albania

PM BEGINS ALBANIA VISIT TOMORROW

from Zainoor Sulaiman 93

TIRANA, July 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad arrives here tomorrow (July 11) to begin a three-day official visit, the first by a Malaysian government leader to this newly liberalised Republic of Albania. *2 Trip overseas*

Dr Mahathir, who will be accompanied by his wife, Datuk Seri Datin Paduka Dr Siti Hasmah Ali, will be met on arrival at the airport by Prime Minister Encik Aleksander Meksi and his wife, Puan Durata Meksi.

The visit is to promote bilateral relations and, explore the possibility of stepping up trade and economic and cultural cooperation.

Dr Mahathir will hold talks with Albanian president Dr Sali Berisha, his counterpart Meksi and members of the Albanian cabinet.

The Prime Minister will also call on the President of the Albanian People's Assembly (Parliament), Encik Pjeter Arbneri. -- more

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Mahathir-Albania 2 Tirana

Dr Mahathir is also scheduled to visit several infrastructure projects, including Durres Port, in which the Malaysian private sector may participate under the development programme of Albania.

The Republic of Albania, until 1991 known as the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, lies in south-eastern Europe. It is bordered by Montenegro to the north, Serbia to the north-east, Macedonia to the east, Greece to the south and the Adriatic and Ionian Seas (parts of the Mediterranean Sea) to the west.

It has a population of 3.2 million with ethnic Albanians forming 98 per cent while others include Greeks, Macedonians, Serbs and Croatsians. The capital, Tirana, has a population of 300,000.

Seventy per cent of Albanians are Muslims, 20 per cent Eastern Orthodox (mainly in the south) while the Roman Catholics (in the north) form 10 per cent of the population.

All religious institutions were closed by the government in 1967 and the practice of religion was prohibited. In 1990, the prohibition on religious activities was lifted and religious services were permitted. -- more

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Mhathir-Albania 3 Tirana

Transitional legislation adopted in April 1991 to replace the 1976 constitution states that Albania is a secular state which observes "freedom of religious belief and creates conditions in which to exercise it".

The economy of Albania is basically agriculture and industry. According to 1988 statistics, 31.5 per cent of the net material product (NMP) was derived from agriculture.

A total 51.7 per cent of the working population was employed in the agriculture sector in 1988. The principal crops are wheat, maize, potatoes, sugar beet, citrus fruit, grapes, olives and tobacco.

A total of 46.3 per cent of the NMP was derived from the industrial sector. It employs 30 per cent of the labour force. Important industrial products include fertilizers, machinery, building materials, cigarettes, textiles, wine, olive oil and raw sugar.

In 1987, the light and foodstuff industries provided more than 85 per cent of domestic requirements while accounting for 38 per cent of gross industrial production and for 40 per cent of the country's total exports. Albania is one of the world's largest producers of Chromite (chromium ore), output being estimated at 239,000 tonnes in 1987. Copper, nickel and coal are also mined. -- more

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Mhathir-Albania 4 (last.) Tirana

It has petroleum resources and its own refining facilities, and in 1990 invited European and US companies to assist in the exploration of both onshore and offshore reserves.

The acceptance of foreign capital to establish joint ventures was authorised in 1990.

Petroleum output was estimated to have declined to one million tonnes in 1990.

Albania's total exports in 1989 was estimated at US\$500 million, the most important exports being chromite, ferroni ckel ore, copper wire, foodstuffs, tobacco products and handicrafts.

Its main imports are minerals, metals, machinery, chemicals and paper and rubber products. Principal trading partners in 1988 were the former Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, the former East Germany, the former Yugoslavia and Italy.

Albania's external debt in 1991 stood at US\$530 million. -- Bernama

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