

Mahathir: Cambodia keen to learn from us

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PHNOM PENH: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday Cambodia was looking to Malaysia as a model to develop its war-ravaged economy.

Cambodia's First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Second Prime Minister Hun Sen conveyed this to him during discussions held on Thursday.

Dr Mahathir said they were impressed with Malaysia's rapid development and were interested to know how the Government went about it.

"They are keen to learn how we develop Malaysia," he told a press conference at the end of his two-day visit.

Dr Mahathir's visit was the first by a foreign head of government during the Cambodian New Year, which fell on Thursday.

The Prime Minister, accompanied by Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed

Ali and a 100-member delegation, will leave for Vietnam today for a three-day visit.

On air links between the two countries, Dr Mahathir said he would ask Malaysia Airlines to increase its flights here and to have Fifth Freedom rights here.

"We have concluded an air services agreement. Considering that their airline is still not in place, we could provide the essential transport needs here," he said.

MAS now flies thrice weekly to Phnom Penh.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was prepared to share its experience with Cambodia with which it had historical links. Many Malaysians were believed to have migrated here long ago.

Describing his trip as fruitful, the Prime Minister said both countries had identified areas of cooperation and how to go about them.

He said Cambodia was

keen to invite Malaysian officials to seminars on development.

"We also agreed to make available places to train their officers in various development programmes," he said.

Dr Mahathir believed the setting-up of the Cambodian Development Council would encourage investments in the country.

"I believe they have in place the necessary legal infrastructure to attract investors," he added.

He said Malaysian investors should not be worried of the country's future as the threat by the Khmer Rouge had diminished.

On the Bilateral Payment Agreement between Bank Negara and Cambodia's central bank, Dr Mahathir hoped it would be signed shortly.

He also said Cambodia was keen to join Asean, but not at the moment. "They are watching the situation."