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Chretien-Visit

CANADIAN PM'S VISIT TO OPEN NEW DIMENSION IN BILATERAL TIES

By: E.Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 5 (Bernama) -- Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien's visit to Malaysia later this month is set to open a new dimension in bilateral relations based on a long-term partnership.

Canadian High Commissioner John P.Bell said today the partnership would be built on Kuala Lumpur-Ottawa's long-standing relations and their solid record of cooperation in the Commonwealth, the United Nations, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the Asean dialogue.

"The visit will create a new level of relationship which recognises our equal partnership in a number of areas for mutual benefit," he told a news conference here ahead of Chretien's two-day official visit to Malaysia beginning Jan 18.

Chretien's entourage, dubbed "Team Canada," will comprise International Trade Minister Roy MacLaren, Secretary of State for Asia Pacific Raymond Chan, nine premiers and territorial leaders and more than 300 business people as well as heads of educational institutions.

The "Team Canada" mission, from Jan 8 to 20, is the second to Asia to promote trade and investments after the one to China in 1994. Apart from Malaysia, the mission will also be visiting India, Pakistan and Indonesia.

The mission, aimed at strengthening and expanding business ties between Canada and the four countries, will focus on transport, energy, agri-food, financial services, environmental, education, information technology and telecommunications services.

The first "Team Canada" mission to China in November 1994 produced contracts and other agreements estimated at C\$8.6 billion (RM11.7 billion).

This will be Chretien's first visit to Malaysia. Pierre Trudeau was the last Canadian Prime Minister to visit Malaysia in 1972.

Bell said the visit, bearing the theme "Building Modern Asia Together," was a unique opportunity to consummate many things which had been discussed by the two governments over the last few years.

An air services agreement between Malaysia Airlines (MAS) and Canadian Airlines International Limited, a cooperation on higher education agreement and a forest cooperation agreement will be signed during the visit.

The air services agreement, or coach air agreement, will provide for direct flights between Kuala Lumpur and Vancouver while the higher education cooperation agreement will facilitate linkages between private institutions of learning in both countries.

In addition, 35 contracts, letters of intent and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) in a number of areas, worth more than RM1 billion, will also be signed, Bell said.

"Opportunities for trade links are found not only in the traditional sectors of agri-food, oil and gas and advanced technology, but also in new areas such as education, transportation, power and construction," Bell said, adding that Canada ranked 13th among foreign investors in Malaysia.

In education, he said Canada hoped to strengthen existing ties and explore opportunities for further cooperation, including twinning programs, setting of branch campuses in Malaysia, joint research projects and student cooperative programmes.

While here, Chretien will have an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar, hold talks with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and open the First Canada-Malaysia Business Leaders Dialogue besides visiting the Light Rail Transit and Kuala Lumpur City Centre

projects. -- BERNAMA