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Mahathir-Arrival

DR MAHATHIR ARRIVES IN CROATIA TO BEGIN BALKAN TOUR

By: Mokhtar Hussain

ZAGREB, April 18 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here today for talks with Croatian leaders and businessmen on the first leg of a three-nation tour to promote trade ties and reconstruction in the war-torn Balkan states.

The Prime Minister, accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, flew in by a special aircraft from Zurich. He was met on arrival at the Zagreb international airport by Croatian Prime Minister Zlatko Matesa and Minister of Economy Davor Stern as minister-in-attendance.

Malaysian Charge d'Affaires Kamal Ismaun was also present.

Dr Mahathir, whose delegation includes top executives of 14 Malaysian companies and government officials, later proceeded to the Banski Dvori (Government Building) where he is scheduled to have a meeting with Croatian Prime Minister Zlatko Matesa before a separate meeting of the two countries' delegations.

The two leaders are expected to focus on trade cooperation and the easing of travel facilities between the two countries.

He will call on President Franjo Tudjman later in the evening.

Among key officials in the Malaysian delegation are International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad and Wisma Putra Secretary-General Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar.

Dr Mahathir will also open the Malaysian Products Exhibition before officially launching the sale of Proton cars at the Zagreb Spring Fair.

After the two delegations' meeting, Dr Mahathir will witness the signing of an agreement on Partial Abolition of Visa Requirements between Dr Toyad and his Croatian counterpart Ivan Simonovic.

The Croatian leg of the Balkan tour will also see the signing of several joint-venture agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) between representatives of Malaysian companies and their Croatian counterparts.

The business delegation is being led by Hicom Berhad chairman Datuk Seri Yahaya Ahmad. Other industry captains are Malaysian Airlines System Berhad chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli, executive chairman of Renong Berhad Tan Sri Halim Saad, Tenaga Nasional Berhad executive chairman Tan Sri Ani Arope, Sapura Holdings Sdn Bhd executive chairman Tan Sri Shamsuddin Abdul Kadir, Arab-Malaysian Merchant Bank chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim and Westmont Berhad's chairman Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie.

Dr Mahathir is also scheduled to meet former Croatian Prime Minister Nikica Valentic before meeting representatives of the Croatian Islamic Centre at his suite at the Inter-Continental Hotel here.

The Prime Minister and his delegation will leave for Sarajevo tomorrow to continue his tour of the Balkan states which will end in Macedonia on April 21.

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