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Mahathir-Saudi

MAHATHIR TO BEGIN FOUR-DAY VISIT TO SAUDI

By: Zulkefli Salleh

MADINAH, (Saudi Arabia) Dec 4 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, accompanied by a 60-member delegation, will arrive here Thursday to begin a four-day official visit, the second by a Malaysian Prime Minister since Independence.

The Prime Minister, whose entourage includes five cabinet ministers, will be received on arrival by the Governor of Madinah, Prince Abdul Majeed bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud at the Royal Pavillion, Prince Mohammed Abdul Aziz Airport.

Dr Mahathir will fly here from the Netherlands where he made a three-day visit.

He will perform the Maghrib and Isyak prayers at the Muslim's second holiest place of worship, Masjid Al Nabawi in this second holiest city in Islam. He will also visit to the tombs of Prophet Muhammad and Caliph Abu Bakar Al-Sideq and Omar Ibni-Al-Khattab within the mosque compound.

On the second day, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to meet Malaysian students in Jeddah before performing the Friday prayers at the Masjid Al Nabawi.

Dr Mahathir will fly to Riyadh late evening to start his visit proper and will be entertained to a state banquet by Crown Prince Abdullah Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, at the Palace of the Crown Prince.

Dr Mahathir will be met on arrival by the Crown Prince who is the Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the National Guards at the King Waled International Airport and given an official welcoming ceremony.

The state dinner will be followed by an official bilateral discussions led by the Prime Minister and the Crown Prince.

According to diplomats, the Saudi Kingdom rarely entertains state guests on a Thursday and Friday.

Accompanying Dr Mahathir will be Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar and Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak as well as Ministers in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha and Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman.

Diplomats have attached great importance to the visit especially in posting Malaysian-Saudi relations supported by long-standing mutual respect and cooperation in Muslim solidarity.

Dr Mahathir will also make a stop in Jeddah (before Riyadh) where he is expected to meet several Saudi captains of industry.

On the third day (Saturday) Dr Mahathir will attend a luncheon meeting with members of the Saudi Federation of Chambers and Industry. Saudi Minister of Interior, Prince Naif Abdul Aziz Al-Saud is expected to call on him in the afternoon.

In the evening, Dr Mahathir is expected to be granted an audience by the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and King of Saudi Arabia, King Fadh at the Conference Palace.

After the audience, Dr Mahathir is slated to fly to Jeddah the same evening from where he will depart for Mecca by car to perform Umrah and spend the night in the Holy City.

He will resume the Umrah rituals the next day (Sunday).

He is scheduled to leave for Jeddah in the afternoon to wrap up his visit with meeting the Malaysian community there. He is scheduled to depart for Kuala Lumpur from King Abdul Aziz International Airport in the evening (8pm).

Saudi Arabia has emerged as Malaysia's largest trading partner in West

Asia after the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The two-way trade in 1995 increased by nine per cent compared to 1994 with a total trade amounting to RM1.5 billion. -- BERNAMA

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