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Mahathir

WARM WELCOME AWAITS DR MAHATHIR IN INDIA

By: Mahesh Prasad

New Delhi, Dec 16 (Bernama) -- The issue of India's possible participation in the Asia-Europe meeting is likely to figure in talks between Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Indian leaders here later this week, analysts said today.

India is expected to take up the case for its membership, they said.

A review of bilateral relations, which have been improving since the first visit of the Malaysian leader to India in December 1993, and regional and international issues were also expected to feature in the discussions.

A warm welcome awaits Dr Mahathir when he arrives on Dec 19 for a three-day official visit. He will be accompanied by Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad.

Dr Mahathir will receive the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding at a glittering ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhawan on Dec 20.

India has achieved full dialogue partner status in Asean with the help of Malaysia and looks forward to a closer relationship with the grouping.

A review of the progress of implementation of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) signed during P.V. Narasimha Rao's visit to Malaysia last year when he was prime minister is also on the cards.

The MOU on Malaysian help for India's National Super Highways project has been stalled with the decision of India's Ministry of Surface Transport to withhold the project.

Renong is among the 22 companies bidding to conduct a feasibility study for the project.

Bilateral cooperation has been intensified in recent years. The Indian Railway Construction Corporation has been helping Malaysia in the setting up and operation of its railway system.

Bilateral trade has jumped nearly threefold from US\$477 million in 1993-1994 to US\$1,220 million in 1995-96.

Malaysia has a huge trade surplus of US\$471 million in 1995-96 compared to a marginal surplus of US\$1.2 million in 1993-94.

Malaysia's principal exports to India include palm oil, wood and wood products, metal scrap, non-ferrous metals, natural rubber, machinery, professional and optical instruments.

Malaysia imports, among other things, meat, machinery and instruments, transport equipment, cotton yarn fabrics and rice from India.

India's imports from Malaysia account for less than 2 percent of its total imports while India's exports to Malaysia are just above one percent of the country's total exports and only 0.9 percent of Malaysia's global imports.

The scope for promoting and expanding trade is therefore very promising.

Dr Mahathir has been encouraging industrialists in his country to invest in other countries.

Malaysian industrialists are in a position to make heavy investments in India in the field of infrastructure such as telecommunications, power and development of highways and ports. -- BERNAMA

MP YBY