

16/06/1997

Dr M on official visit to Lebanon

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who goes on a three-day official visit to Lebanon from today, is the first Malaysian Prime Minister to do so.

His visit is expected to strengthen ties between two countries that date back in 1965 only to be interrupted by a 17-year turmoil that faced Beirut.

According to a Wisma Putra official, Malaysia reestablished ties with Lebanon in 1992 after the war.

"Malaysia and Lebanon had early relations. Lebanon was the first country where Malaysia had an honorary council. This was in 1965.

"Malaysia's first trade office in West Asia was in Beirut because it was important in terms of commodity.

"However, we had to close our trade office in 1976 when the war broke out," the official said.

In Lebanon, Dr Mahathir will have a bilateral meeting with his Lebanese counterpart.

Malaysia signed an air services agreement with Lebanon in May 1974 but started implementing the agreement only recently. Malaysia Airlines now fly to Beirut via Dubai twice weekly, which makes it the first Asian airline to fly to Beirut. Meanwhile, the Lebanese national airline flies to Malaysia weekly, en route to Sydney.

Bilateral trade reached RM56 million in 1996, up from RM14 million in 1990. Malaysia signed a trade agreement with Lebanon in March 1995.

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