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Mahathir-Visit

DR MAHATHIR ENDS BAHRAIN VISIT ON SUCCESSFUL NOTE

By: Abdul Rahman Ahmad

MANAMA, April 9 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad concluded his visit to Bahrain on a successful note with the two countries agreeing to take steps to improve relations through air links and the establishment of a commission to identify areas of cooperation.

He said both sides had also agreed on the need to establish trade agreements such as that on the avoidance of double taxation and protection of investment in future.

The establishment of the commission was important as this was a way of getting government officials and ministers to meet regularly and discuss ways to improve trade or to identifying problems holding up trade, he told a news conference at the end of his three-day visit. Earlier he had visited Kuwait for three days.

Dr Mahathir's visit to the two Gulf states was part of his efforts to improve bilateral trade and help open up more market opportunities for Malaysian businessmen, particularly in the Gulf, which had been dormant.

Malaysia's total trade with Kuwait stood at US\$107.68 million last year while that with Bahrain amounted to US\$39.88 million, which is considered small despite Bahrain being a big importer of various goods ranging from foodstuff to machinery. (US\$1=RM2.50)

Dr Mahathir said the economic ministers of both countries might sit on the commission together with private sector representatives.

The decision to set up the commission was reached between Dr Mahathir and his Bahrain counterpart Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa during bilateral talks at the Shaikh Hamad Palace, here, yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said his meeting with Shaikh Khalifa had given them the opportunity to realise the need for the two countries to know each other better and to help each other develop their economies.

"I believe that relations with Bahrain will certainly improve," he said, adding that the private sector should play a role too by having meetings and discussions as well as identifying areas where they could complement each other.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia had no plans to set up an embassy here as the Malaysian ambassador in Kuwait, Datuk Zulkifli Abdul Rahman, had been accredited to Bahrain.

However, he said, Malaysia was thinking of setting up an honorary consul here if it was acceptable to the Bahrain government and this would eventually lead to the opening of an embassy here in future.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia hoped the Bahrain government would either set up an embassy in Kuala Lumpur or accredit any of its ambassadors in the Far East to the Malaysian capital. Bahrain has no representative in Kuala Lumpur at the moment.

"Malaysia has no plan to station a trade commissioner here but it may seriously think about it or appoint a honorary consul or some kind of representation in Bahrain," he said, adding that Malaysia realised the need to be represented in this archipelago of more than 33 islands which is becoming an important offshore financial centre.

As for the air links, he said both sides had expressed the need for better communication through linkages between of the airlines of the two countries to increase trade.

Currently Malaysia Airlines (MAS) has no service to the island capital while Bahrain's national carrier, Gulf Air, recently started its direct

flight service to Kuala Lumpur. -- BERNAMA
ARA JK