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KL plays host to trade teams

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THE traffic police have had their hands full this year.

Many would have noticed them busy holding up traffic along the Federal Highway, specifically the stretch between the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah airport in Subang and Kuala Lumpur city to make way for motorcades of visiting VIPs who were spared KL's horrific traffic snarls and given a smooth ride to the city instead.

1997 may just be approaching its first half, but already Malaysia has been very busy playing the role of hospitable host to a number of VIPs and their delegations on official visits as well as trade missions scouting for business opportunities and investors.

To date, Malaysia has hosted more than two dozens of visits by foreign VIPs and well over a dozen trade missions.

Some of the VIPs included Malaysia as part of their main stops in their whirlwind tours of this region. Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, for example, was on a five-nation South-East Asian tour and stopped in Malaysia briefly before continuing on his journey.

Others were lucky enough to squeeze in several days' stay and took in the sights at some of Malaysia's beautiful beach resorts such as Langkawi, as did the Hungarian Prime Minister, Gyula Horn and his wife, Anna, who were in KL for two days from April 21.

Although Malaysia only got to play gracious host to its guests for short periods of time - mostly between two and six days - the VIPs had tightly-packed schedules, as most of them wanted to make the most of their brief stay.

Upon their arrival, they were usually accorded a ceremonial welcome and inspection of the guard of honour at Parliament Square. For heads of states, this would usually be followed by an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Jaafar and Permaisuri Agung Tuanku Mahijah at the Istana Negara.

Another "must do" on the itinerary list is a briefing at the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's department, followed by a dinner hosted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Most delegations will witness the signings of several agreements and memorandums of understanding, aimed at boosting bilateral relations and fostering closer economic cooperation between the two countries.

In between, they will be whisked off to see some of Malaysia's pride and joy, including the world's tallest building Petronas Twin Towers, and the KL Tower plus a visit to the Proton plant in Shah Alam.

Trade missions sent here focused on their purpose, which was to increase and promote trade on a state-to-state basis, while other visitors such as Thai Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, who visited Malaysia from March 18 till 20, had a slightly different focus for visiting.

The Princess, and her 12-member team comprising officials from the Royal court, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Agriculture, conducted a study on the cultivation of temperate plants and flowers in Cameron Highlands.

The Thai Foreign Minister, Prachuan Chaiyasan, gave his pledge to help check the entry of illegal foreign workers who were entering Malaysia through its borders with Thailand.

South African President Nelson Mandela, Mozambique President Joaquim A, Chissano, German president Roman Herzog, Tatarstan President Mintimer

Shaimiev, and the Prime Ministers of Thailand, Japan, Cambodia, Croatia and Egypt were among those for whom red carpets have been rolled, Malaysian style.

Trade missions include those from Germany, Thailand, Bangladesh, Canada, Britain, Finland, Spain and Turkey, to name just a few.

As the country continues to impress others outside the region with its rapid growth and unique leadership, it does seem that the traffic police are going to have a very busy time through the remaining months of the year.

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