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Kofi Annan here on Sunday for four-day visit

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan will arrive here on Sunday for a four-day bilateral visit at the invitation of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

A Wisma Putra statement today said that he will be accompanied by his wife and officials from the UN Secretariat.

During his visit, Annan and his wife will have an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah.

He will also meet Dr Mahathir, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Annan will also attend briefings by the Economic Planning Unit, the Multimedia Development Corporation and deliver a dinner talk organised by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs.

He will visit the UN office here and meet with members of the Governing Council of the United Nations Association of Malaysia.

This will be the second visit by a UN secretary-general to Malaysia. Former UN secretary-general Javier Perez de Cuellar made a bilateral visit in 1985.

A Bernama report from Washington quoted UN spokesman Juan Carlos Brandt as saying in a telephone interview from the UN headquarters in New York yesterday that Annan's visit to Kuala Lumpur was important as it affirmed Malaysia's important contributions to the UN.

"Malaysia's contributions to the UN are extremely important and the first thing that comes to mind is the 51st presidency of the UN General Assembly under Tan Sri Razali Ismail, who was an excellent leader in conducting the affairs of the general assembly," Brandt said.

"Everybody agrees the important contribution Malaysia has given to the international community through his leadership," he said.

Malaysia has also participated in peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Somalia under the UN banner and has been active in other UN-related social and economic programmes, he said.

Annan's bilateral talks with Dr Mahathir would cover wide-ranging issues including reform efforts in the UN, the Security Council, Iraq, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Angola.

They are also expected to discuss issues related to drug trafficking, the environment and landmines, Brandt said.

Asked if the secretary-general was willing to talk about Malaysia's call for a review of the UN human rights charter, Brandt said that there was no need to review the charter as long as it was understood by all members that the charter contained universal elements acceptable to all.

In fact, Brandt said, as the UN celebrated its 50th Universal Declaration of Human Rights yesterday, Annan would emphasise in his speech that there was no single model of democracy, human rights or cultural expression in the world, but there should be democracy, human rights and free cultural expression in all the world.

Annan's visit coincides with the Asean Informal Summit from Dec 14-16, which would include a meeting between Asean leaders and leaders from China, Japan and South Korea.

Other issues to be discussed with Asean leaders include unpaid dues by UN members, said Brandt.

The United States still owes about US\$1.5 billion (RM5.54 billion) in

unpaid dues to the UN, said Brandt, but has paid enough to remain outside the risk of losing its voting rights at the general assembly.

US Ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson said here on Tuesday that the US is the biggest "deadbeat" at the UN for its failure to pay up its dues to the world body.

He said the US is now faced with trying to convince the UN to drop its assessment from 25 per cent of the UN budget to 20 per cent but opined that there was "no way" the requested cut would be granted in light of its arrears.

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