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Mahathir-Botswana

MAHATHIR ARRIVES IN BOTSWANA FOR OFFICIAL VISIT

By: E.Sivabalan

GABORONE (Botswana), May 3 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here today for a five-day official visit to Botswana to strengthen bilateral ties and to advance Malaysian commercial interests after a successful trip to Malawi, another southern African nation.

The Prime Minister was earlier in Blantyre for a three-day visit to the Republic of Malawi as part of his week-long tour of three southern African nations which will also take him to South Africa.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali arrived at the Sir Seretse Khama airport at the Botswanan capital at about 11am (5pm Malaysian time). They were greeted on arrival by Botswanan President Sir Ketumile Masire and his wife, Lady Gladys Masire.

The red carpet was rolled out for the Malaysian leader at the official welcome ceremony. He later inspected a guard-of-honour.

The Prime Minister's 31-member delegation includes Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie and captains of industry led by Arab-Malaysian Group chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled for a tete-a-tete with the Botswanan President later today to be followed by a bilateral delegation meeting.

After the meeting, Dr Mahathir will tour the National Museum and Art Gallery before holding a dialogue session with Malaysian and Botswanan businessmen at the Grand Palm Hotel here at 5.15pm (11.15pm Malaysian time).

On Sunday, Dr Mahathir will receive separate courtesy calls from Opposition leader Dr K.K.Koma and Speaker of the National Parliament M.P.K.Nwako.

On the same day, the Prime Minister will depart by air for Kasane, a town located about 1,300 km north of the Botswanan capital, to attend the three-day First South African International Dialogue (First Said 1997).

On Monday, the Malaysian leader is expected to deliver a special address at the dialogue.

The dialogue is similar to the Langkawi International Dialogue on Smart Partnership between the public and private sector held in Malaysia last July.

The Prime Minister and his entourage are scheduled to leave for South Africa from Gaborone on Wednesday.

Botswana, a nation that lies at the centre of the southern African plateau, is bounded west and north by Namibia, north-east by Zambia and Zimbabwe and south by South Africa. An area of 600,360 square km with the Kalahari Desert occupying the western half of the country, the republic has a population of nearly 1.6 million.

Botswana is the world's largest producer of diamonds by value.

Malaysia's trade with Botswana in 1996 increased to RM1.35 million (US\$0.54 million) from RM0.54 million (US\$0.22 million) in 1995. Exports to Botswana were valued at RM1.35 million (US\$0.54 million) while imports from Botswana were negligible amounting to a mere RM308 (US\$123).

The trade balance was RM1.35 million (US\$0.54 million) in Malaysia's favour.

Malaysia's main exports to Botswana in 1996 was medicaments, which accounted for RM1.30 million (US\$0.52 million) or 96.2 per cent of Malaysia's total export to Botswana in 1996. Articles of plastics, soap, cleansing and polishing preparations and furniture were also exported in

small quantities in 1996.

Malaysia's imports from Botswana in 1995 were centrifugal pumps and live animals (for the zoo) which amounted to only RM91,000 (US\$36,400). The imports for 1996 were not classified according to kind because of the small transaction involved.

Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Berhad (Proton) was reported to have expressed interest in expanding its export network in Africa including Botswana, to boost its exports and to cushion itself against possible fluctuations in domestic demand. -- BERNAMA

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