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Mahathir-Malawi

MAHATHIR ARRIVES IN MALAWI FOR A THREE-DAY VISIT

By: E. Sivabalan

BLANTYRE (MALAWI), May 1 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here today for a three-day official visit to the Republic of Malawi, the first leg of his week-long tour of three African countries.

The private aircraft carrying the Prime Minister and his entourage arrived at this commercial and industrial city, located about 300km north-west of Lilongwe, the capital of this south-central African nation, at 4 p.m (10 p.m Malaysian time).

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, was greeted at the Blantyre airport by Malawi President Dr Bakili Muluzi, a Muslim in a predominantly Christian nation.

The Prime Minister's 31-member delegation includes Energy, Telecommunications and Post Minister Datuk Leo Moggie and top businessmen led by Arab-Malaysia Group chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim.

Later, at the official welcoming ceremony which was held at the airport itself, the Malaysian leader inspected a guard-of-honour.

Dr Mahathir's three-day visit to Malawi, his first to this republic, is to reciprocate Dr Muluzi's visit to Malaysia last September. The Prime Minister will also visit Botswana and South Africa during the seven day tour.

Tonight, Dr Mahathir will attend a private dinner with Dr Muluzi.

Tomorrow, the Malaysian leader is scheduled to call on Dr Muluzi at Sanjika Palace, the presidential office, at 9.30 a.m (3.30 p.m Malaysian time) to be followed by a bilateral delegation meeting.

After the meeting, Dr Mahathir will perform the ground breaking ceremony of Malaysian-based G-Two Holdings Berhad's RM70 million Blantyre City Centre Hotel project here.

The 188-room hotel project is being undertaken by Malawi Resorts World Limited, 74 per cent controlled by Malaysian investors and the rest by the Malawi Development Corporation. It is expected to be completed by end of next year.

Construction-based G-Two, the first major Malaysian company to operate in Malawi besides Telekom Malaysia Berhad, is also constructing a new settlement area which also includes low-cost homes on a 800-hectre land in this country.

The RM3 billion settlement project is expected to be completed in stages within 15 to 20 years, its executive director Datuk Lim Huah Leong told Bernama here today.

Later on Friday, Dr Mahathir will proceed to the Blantyre Mosque to perform prayers with other Malaysian Muslims followed by a private lunch.

Dr Mahathir and his entourage is then scheduled to tour the Telekom Networks Limited's headquarters here.

Telekom Network is a joint venture company between Telekom Malaysia and the Malawi Posts and Telecommunications Corporation. The joint venture which was issued a licence to operate a mobile cellular communications system and a Packet Switched Data Network (PSDN), was opened by Moggie here on May 11 last year.

The Prime Minister will attend a state banquet hosted by the Malawian President tomorrow night.

He will depart for Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, scheduled at 8.30 a.m (2.30 p.m Malaysian time) on Saturday to begin the second leg of his tour.

Covering an area of nearly 119,000 square km, Malawi, a landlocked country with a population of nearly 11 million, shares a boundary with Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.

Malaysia's total trade with Malawi in 1996 stood at RM2.55 million (US\$1.02 million), an increase of 36.4 per cent from RM1.87 million (US\$0.75 million) in 1995.

Exports to Malawi amounted to RM1.13 million (US\$0.45 million) and imports amounted to RM1.42 million (US\$0.57 million). Malaysia's trade deficit with Malawi was RM0.29 million (US\$0.12 million).

In 1996, Malaysia's exports were valued at RM1.13 million (US\$0.45 million), a decrease of 15 per cent from RM1.33 million (US\$0.53 million) in 1995. The main export items were palm stearin which accounted for 47.8 per cent of the total exports followed by electrical apparatus, resistors and other electrical bases; parts and accessories for office machines; radio broadcast receivers and rubber tyres, tyre flaps and inner tubes for wheels.

Malaysia's imports from Malawi in 1996 were valued at RM1.42 million (US\$0.57 million), an increase of 162.9 per cent from 1995.

This was due to the increase in the imports of dhall. Dhall remains the single largest product imported from Malawi which accounted for 93.7 per cent of the total imports in 1996. -- BERNAMA

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