

03 OCT 1997

Mahathir-Arrive

MAHATHIR ARRIVES IN ARGENTINA ON LAST LEG OF LATIN AMERICAN VISIT

By: K.C. Leong

BUENOS AIRES, Oct 3 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here Thursday for a three-day official visit to Argentina, the last leg of his four-nation tour of Latin America.

The Prime Minister, who had earlier visited Cuba, Chile and Uruguay, will jointly inaugurate with President Carlos Menem an Argentine National Exporters conference on Friday.

The two leaders will later meet at Government House before leading their respective delegations to a working session. Among the Malaysian officials attending the meeting will be Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa.

Later, he is scheduled to witness the signing of an agreement on the reciprocal exemption of taxation on income from aircraft and ship operations between the two countries.

Friday night, he will attend an official dinner given by President Menem while in the afternoon he will be the guest of honour at a luncheon given by the Buenos Aires Stock Exchange.

Dr Mahathir and the Argentine leader will jointly inaugurate a Malaysian Food and Cultural Festival at a leading hotel here on Thursday night.

Meanwhile, members of the business delegation accompanying the Prime Minister on his visit, will meet top local businessmen and industrialists in a separate programme arranged by the Malaysian Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) Friday morning.

At the launching of the food and cultural festival, Dr Mahathir said relations between Malaysia and Argentina as well as between Southeast Asia and Latin America had entered a new and exciting stage.

He said that although relations between Malaysia and Argentina were relatively new, they had grown rapidly and bilateral trade last year totalled US400 million (about RM1.2 billion). Malaysia was now Argentina's third largest trading partner in Asia.

Malaysia Airlines now serve as a unique bridge between the Asia-Pacific region and Latin America as old barriers gave way to new opportunities, Dr Mahathir said.

He paid tribute to President Menem for long ago sensing that Asia and Latin America were natural allies in their mutual quest for global peace and economic and social progress and became the first Argentine President to visit Malaysia, even before he visited Argentina. -- BERNAMA

LKC TS