

26 APR 1997

Mahathir-Africa

MAHATHIR TO TOUR THREE AFRICAN NATIONS TO ENHANCE TIES

By: E.Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, April 26 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will visit the African continent next week in yet another endeavour to boost South-South linkages with three emerging economies.

The week-long trip will take him to southern Africa with his first stop in Malawi on May 1-3 followed by Botswana on May 3-7 and a brief stop-over in South Africa on May 7.

The prime minister's trip to Africa comes as dictatorships are yielding to democracy with more than 25 sub-Saharan countries having held democratic elections since 1990, tourists attractions are being upgraded and economies are expanding.

Dr Mahathir will be accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

To prove Malaysia's commitment and determination in helping developing countries, the prime minister will bring along a high-powered business delegation. Also accompanying Dr Mahathir will be Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie and senior government officials.

In Blantyre, the chief commercial and industrial city of the Republic of Malawi, a south-central nation bounded by Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia, Dr Mahathir will hold talks with Malawian President Dr Bakili Muluzi.

Malaysia and Malawi signed two agreements -- on Trade and Investment Guarantee -- during Dr Muluzi's visit to Malaysia last September.

During his three-day visit there, the prime minister is scheduled to tour the headquarters of Telekom Networks Limited, a joint-venture company between Telekom Malaysia Berhad and the Malawi Posts and Telecommunications Corporation, in Blantyre.

The company, which was issued a licence to operate a mobile cellular communications system and a Packet Switched Data Network (PSDN), was officially opened by Moggie in Blantyre on May 11 last year.

Malaysia's trade with Malawi in 1996 stood at RM2.55 million, an increase of 36.4 per cent from RM1.87 million in 1995.

Malaysia's exports to Malawi include printed matters, alcohol, phenols and derivatives, automatic data processing machines, electrical machinery and apparel and clothing while Malawi exports mainly vegetables and tubers, oil seeds and fruits to Malaysia.

The second leg of the prime minister's tour will be Botswana, an inland country of southern Africa, bounded west and north by Namibia, north-east by Zambia and Zimbabwe, and south by South Africa.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled for a tete-a-tete with Botswana President Sir Ketumile Masire upon his arrival in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana on May 3.

Sir Ketumile was in Langkawi last July to attend the Second Langkawi International Dialogue on Smart Partnership.

Dr Mahathir is also expected to address the Botswana-Malaysia Business Council and to travel to Kasane, north of Gaborone, on May 4 to deliver his keynote address at the First South African International Dialogue 1997.

At present, there are no Malaysian investments in Botswana which is the world's largest producer of diamonds by value.

Malaysia's trade with Botswana in 1996 increased to RM1.35 million from RM0.54 million in 1995.

Dr Mahathir will be in South Africa on May 7 where he will receive the "Order of Good Hope", South Africa's highest award, from President Nelson Mandela in Cape Town.

The prime minister made an unofficial visit to South Africa in 1992 and an official one in August 1995 while Mandela last visited Malaysia last month. -- BERNAMA

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