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Malaysia and Cuba to sign three accords

Kamarul Yunus in Havana

HAVANA, Fri: The four - day official visit to Cuba by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad which began yesterday is expected open a new chapter in cooperation and enhanced ties between the two countries.

Three agreements - visa abolition, promotion and reciprocal protection of investments, and trade - are expected to be signed today. Dr Mahathir and Cuban President Fidel Castro will witness the signing of the agreements after a one-to-one meeting in the morning.

Tomorrow, Dr Mahathir will deliver a speech on business opportunities in Malaysia at a luncheon with Cuban businessmen organised by the Cuban Chamber of Commerce.

During his stay in Cuba, Dr Mahathir will visit the bio-technology centre and HIV/AIDS institute, a tourism resort and the Darsena marina project in Varadero.

Accompanied by ministers, menteris besar and businessmen, the Prime Minister, who is on his first visit to Cuba, was received by Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Raibana upon arrival at the Jose Marti International Airport here yesterday.

In the delegation are Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa, along with Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, Terengganu Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad.

Malaysia Airlines chairman and chief executive officer Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli leads the business delegation.

Cuba has a population of 12 million people. Its industries include sugar, petroleum, food, tobacco, textiles, chemicals, paper and wood products, metals (particularly nickel), cement, fertiliser, consumer goods and farm machinery.

Main exports are sugar, nickel, shellfish, tobacco, medical products, citrus fruits and coffee. Canada, China and Russia are its main trading partners.

Cuba imports petroleum, food, machinery and chemicals, mainly from Spain, Mexico and Russia.

The Prime Minister's visit to Cuba is part of his 11-day South American tour which includes Chile, Uruguay and Argentina.

Dr Mahathir made a brief stopover in Madrid, Spain, and met his counterpart, Mr Jose Maria Aznar, before flying to Cuba. The Prime Minister will leave for Santiago, Chile, on Sunday.

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