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Traditional welcome for Dr M in Kuwait

Ahmad A. Talib in Kuwait

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed arrived yesterday for a three-day official visit, the second Malaysian Prime Minister to do so since 1975.

Accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Dr Mahathir was given the traditional State welcoming ceremony.

Kuwait's Acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah led the welcoming ceremony in bright sunshine after a short morning downpour. Dr Mahathir and his entourage were then taken to the Bayan Palace, one of Kuwait's State Guest House, where he will reside during the visit.

Malaysia-Kuwait relations rose to new heights after Tun Abdul Razak Hussein's visit in 1975. Ties now extend beyond the Economic and Technical Co-operation Agreement signed then.

These ties took on an even more significant level when Malaysia supported the United Nations resolution in 1991 which allowed for military intervention leading to the state's liberation following the Iraqi invasion the previous year.

Reflecting Malaysia's seriousness to intensify trade and commercial relations with the oil-rich state, the Prime Minister's entourage also included Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Affifuddin Omar, Terengganu Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud and several senior government officials from the Treasury and Foreign Ministry.

To ensure the Government-to-Government deliberations would be followed up, the Prime Minister brings along a corps of top flight businessmen led by Malaysia Airlines chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli.

Also in the business delegation are Sapura group executive chairman Tan Sri Shamsuddin Abdul Kadir, Land and General Berhad chairman Tan Sri Wan Azmi Wan Hamzah, Securities Commission chairman Datuk Dr Munir Majid, Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional managing director Datuk Mohamad Nadzmi Mohamd Salleh, (see CORRECTION above) Bank Bumiputra's Datuk Abdul Aziz Osman and Chase Perdana chairman Datuk Dr Mohan Swami.

Apart from meeting the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Dr Mahathir will also hold discussions with other government and business leaders here.

The increasing trade volume between Kuwait and Malaysia augurs well for bilateral ties.

In 1987, two-way trade was about RM19 million and this has increased to more than RM260 million currently.

With growing peace in Kuwait, Malaysian businessmen may be persuaded to look deeply into new areas of investment.

This would not be difficult since the small state of about 1.5 million people are actively looking for new businesses to diversify from its long-time dependence on oil.

Kuwait has a large population of foreign labour, namely Bangladeshis, Filipinos and Arabs from the neighbouring countries.

A small number of our students are also pursuing higher education in that country.

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