

24 JAN 1998

Velez-Arrive

COLOMBIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ARRIVES FOR THREE-DAY VISIT

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 24 (Bernama) -- Colombian Foreign Minister Dr Maria Emma Mejia Velez arrived here tonight for a three-day official visit to Malaysia to enhance diplomatic and economic ties between both countries.

She was greeted on arrival at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang by Wisma Putra's Principal Assistant Secretary for the America Division Wan Jaafar Wan Mahmud.

Dr Velez said Colombia was keen to strengthen relations not only in the political aspect but also in economic and trade links.

She hoped that the upcoming visit by Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik to Colombia would pave the way for the introduction of rubber and oil palm plantations in the South American country.

She said Colombia wished to increase bilateral trade with Malaysia which stood at US\$40 million now.

Dr Velez said her government hoped that rubber and oil palm plantations would be a perfect substitute for coca growers in Colombia.

" We think rubber and oil palm can be a useful alternative for drugs derived from coca plantations," she said.

She is scheduled to call on her Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Monday and meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad the next day.

She will also open a photographic exhibition titled " Colombia dia a dia (Colombia day-to-day) by renowned Colombian photographer Fransisco Carranza at the National Library here on Monday.

A 10-member business delegation is also in her entourage. -- BERNAMA
MHI TS