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Malaysia keen to share experience with Laos: Dr M

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia is ever willing to share its development experience and technical know-how to assist Laos in its nation-building efforts in the spirit of Asean and South-South cooperation.

He told his Laotian counterpart, Mr Sisavath Keobounphanh, that the members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations must work together even more vigorously to enhance intra-Asean trade and promote the use of local currencies in regional trade.

"While our bilateral relationship is on the right course, our total trade today is really nothing to speak of. Notwithstanding this, I am convinced that there is ample scope for expansion given the enormous potential and items available for trading purposes in both countries," Dr Mahathir said at the official dinner for Sisavath at Sri Perdana last night.

Sisavath arrived in Kuala Lumpur yesterday for a three-day official visit. This is the first visit by a Laotian head of Government since the country joined Asean in July last year. He is leading a 12-member delegation comprising several senior ministers and officials.

Malaysia, according to Dr Mahathir, is the fifth largest investor in Laos with investments valued at over RM1 billion in 18 projects. Malaysian investments are mainly concentrated in road building and construction sector, banking and service industries.

To date, both countries have signed a number of agreements, namely, the bilateral investment guarantee agreement, the air services agreement, the economic, scientific and technical cooperation agreement, the bilateral payments arrangement and a memorandum of understanding on energy cooperation.

"It is my hope that the bilateral trade agreement and the tourism cooperation agreement that will be signed between our two countries will provide additional impetus to lift our bilateral economic and trade relations," Dr Mahathir said.

The agreements are expected to be signed today, following a meeting between the two Prime Ministers.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia is pleased that Laos has participated enthusiastically in Asean activities since becoming a member and has made constructive proposals for enhanced intra-Asean cooperation.

"I am also impressed with the role played by Laos in fostering the climate of peace and development cooperation in the Mekong sub-region to transform this area into one of shared growth and affluence aimed at eradicating poverty and elevating the quality of life," Dr Mahathir added.

Earlier, Sisavath and his wife, Mrs Khamla Keobounphanh, were met on arrival at the KL International Airport in Sepang by Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Leo Michael Toyad and Deputy Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Abu Bakar Daud, who is the minister-in-attendance.

Sisavath was also accorded an official welcome at Parliament Square. He inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by officers and men of the 1st Battalion Royal Malay Regiment after the national anthems of the two countries were played.

Today, both Dr Mahathir and Sisavath are expected to discuss the financial and economic situation in the region and joint efforts to

overcome the problems.

Sisavath will also attend a luncheon meeting with members of the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He and his wife are also scheduled to have an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Ja'afar and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah at Istana Negara.

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