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Mahathir-Sudan

SUDAN ROLLS OUT RED CARPET FOR MAHATHIR

By: Azman Ujang

KHARTOUM, May 13 (Bernama) -- Sudan rolled out the red carpet for Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in a ceremonial welcome normally reserved for heads of state when he arrived here this afternoon for a three-day official visit to this largest country in Africa.

President Hassan Ahmed al-Bashir, doing away with protocol, personally greeted Dr Mahathir who flew in from Cairo where he attended the just-concluded summit meeting of leaders of the Group of 15 (G15) developing countries.

The special executive jet bringing the prime minister and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, touched down at Khartoum International Airport at 3.30pm (9.30pm Malaysian time) under scorching temperatures reaching 43 degrees Celcius.

A tight programme of meetings with Sudanese officials, media, intellectuals, scholars and businessmen awaits Dr Mahathir, the first Malaysian premier to visit predominantly Muslim Sudan.

Sudan, with a land size about half of Europe, is hogging international headlines right now mainly because some 700,000 people in the country's southern parts are reported to be dying of starvation.

Bernama understands that Malaysia is expected to donate rice supplies to be sent to the affected areas during Dr Mahathir's visit.

Shortly after arrival, the prime minister will call on President Bashir at the Presidential Palace for four-eyed meeting expected to focus on enhancing the already growing economic ties between the two countries.

Dr Mahathir is also getting another award here, an honorary Doctorate of Law from the Khartoum University.

Malaysia is now the second biggest foreign investor in Sudan after China, the most significant being an oil exploration and production joint venture between Petronas and Sudan's state oil company.

Oil production is expected to begin in June next year on completion of a 1,600km pipeline project also involving the Malaysian national oil company and state oil companies of China and Canada.

Dr Mahathir will also open the Petronas office here on Friday.

In between, he will meet First Vice President Ali Osman Mohamad Taha who is the country's de facto prime minister, grant an interview with Sudanese official media and a dialogue with the local intellectuals, scholars and parliamentarians.

He will wrap up the visit on Friday with a joint press conference with President Bashir.

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