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VIETNAM'S PRESIDENT ENDS LANDMARK VISIT TO MALAYSIA

By: Ahamd Zukiman Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, March 18 (Bernama) -- Vietnam's President Tran duc Luong left for Singapore today after a landmark three-day visit to Malaysia -- the first by a Vietnamese head of state since diplomatic ties between the countries were established in 1973.

Luong was seen off at the airport by acting Foreign Minister Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman and Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, who is the minister-in-attendance.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi is in Qatar for the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) foreign affairs meeting.

The Vietnamese leader had a farewell audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar at Istana Negara before winding up his visit.

Apart from enhancing Kuala Lumpur-Hanoi ties, Luong's trip was to reciprocate the visit by Tuanku Ja'afar to Vietnam in December 1995. It was also Luong's first trip abroad since taking over the post in September last year.

Luong was accompanied by a 35-member delegation comprising several ministers, deputy ministers and businessmen.

In a statement released through Wisma Putra, the Vietnamese delegation described the visit as successful and an important contribution to further strengthening of cooperation and mutual understanding.

"President Tran duc Luong expressed his high achievements recorded by the Malaysian people over the past years and is confident that the Malaysian people will succeed in realising the 'Vision 2020', turning Malaysia into an industrialised country by early next century," it added.

Malaysia is among the top 10 investors in Vietnam with 64 projects and a total of investment capital of over US\$1.3 billion. (US\$1=RM3.7). The total two-way trade has grown 25 fold over the past 10 years and now reached US\$485 million.

Malaysian Ambassador to Vietnam Datuk Zainal Abidin Zain said the visit was significant in enhancing bilateral relations and in promoting intra-Asean trade.

"It has also enabled the leaders to look at the preparation of the Asean Summit to be hosted by Vietnam this year," he told Bernama.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that during his discussion with Luong, the Vietnamese leader expressed Vietnam's support for the promotion of intra-Asean trade using the currencies of member nations.

The two leaders also touched on the economic turmoil facing the region, the upcoming Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in London and the Asia-Pacific Economic (APEC) summit to be held here later this year.

Luong also visited the Petronas Twin Towers, the Craft Cultural Complex in Jalan Conlay here, an oil palm refinery in Sepang and the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) in Kepong. -- BERNAMA

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