

15 AUG 1999

Mahathir-Arrival

MAHATHIR BEGINS RUSSIAN VISIT

By: Azman Ujang

KHABAROVSK (Russia), Aug 15 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here tonight to begin a three-day visit to this Far Eastern territory of Russia.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, flew in aboard a Malaysian government Canadair Special Edition jet at 10pm local time (three hours ahead of Malaysian time) from the Wuhan province in China where the aircraft made a technical stop-over after a flight from Kuala Lumpur.

Another Malaysian government Falcon 900 jet landed minutes earlier carrying members of the Prime Minister's entourage who included Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and Defence Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha.

On hand to greet the Prime Minister were Khabarovsk Region Head of Administration Victor Ishaev, senior local officials and Malaysian Ambassador to Russia Datuk Yahya Baba.

Also present were about 30 senior executives of Rimbunan Hijau Sdn Bhd, the Malaysia timber company which has a logging concession in this region, led by its managing director Tan Sri Tiong Hiew King.

Shortly on arrival, the Prime Minister inspected a military guard of honour and was introduced to local dignitaries by Ishaev. Dr Mahathir, in turn, introduced to Ishaev members of his delegation.

Tomorrow morning, Dr Mahathir will hold a bilateral meeting with Ishaev, before departing for Komsomolsk-na-Amur, 400 kilometres from here, where he will visit an aircraft production plant.

The plant produces both military and commercial aircraft, including MIG fighter jets, of which the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) has a fleet.

He will fly back to Khabarovsk in the afternoon where he will visit the office of Rimbunan Hijau, the only Malaysian investor in Russia.

This will be followed by a press conference by the Prime Minister for Malaysian journalists here, covering his visit.

Ishaev will host a dinner for Dr Mahathir and his delegation.

The Prime Minister will visit other places of interest during his stay and before leaving on Wednesday for Beijing, will hold a joint press conference with Ishaev.

Besides air and sea links, Khabarovsk is connected to other parts of Russia by the Trans-Siberian railway, the world's longest.

Spanning 10,000 kilometres, the railway journey from here to Moscow takes seven days.

Dr Mahathir will be in China two days and his visit coincides with the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Malaysia.

From China, Dr Mahathir will continue his tour to Russia by going to Buryatia, the autonomous republic in the South-Central region of Siberia along the eastern shore of lake Baikal, the world's deepest lake at over one kilometre, and which is two thirds the size of Peninsular Malaysia.

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