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Hasina-Visit

HASINA TO VISIT MALAYSIA ON JULY 31

By: Shafiqul Bashar

DHAKA, July 26 (Bernama) -- Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will pay a three-day official visit to Malaysia from Monday at the invitation of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"We are certainly looking forward to this visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina which will consolidate and deepen existing brotherly relations between the two countries," said State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury who will accompany Sheikh Hasina during her visit.

Talking to Bernama here, Abul Hasan said: "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina always attached great importance to bilateral relation between Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur and considered Malaysia as a great and close friend of Bangladesh.

"Sheikh Hasina is keen to meet the great leader Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his country."

Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Bangladesh's founder-President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has met Dr Mahathir several times at international conferences abroad since she became prime minister in 1996.

Dr Mahathir paid three official visits to Bangladesh since becoming prime minister in July 1981, the last being in March 1999.

Monday's visit by Sheikh Hasina is her first official visit to Malaysia as a prime minister. Previously, former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and former Presidents Hussain Muhammad Ershad and Ziaur Rahman had visited Malaysia.

Abul Hasan Chowdhury visited Malaysia soon after his appointment as State Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1996. According to him, it was his first visit abroad under the instruction of Sheikh Hasina to promote economic diplomacy with Malaysia and other countries.

He said Malaysia was the third largest foreign investor in Bangladesh after the United States and Britain.

"Bilateral trade between the two countries has been expanding while more and more Malaysian investment is coming to Bangladesh," he said.

Malaysian entrepreneurs have so far invested US\$1.3 billion (US\$1=RM3.8) in Bangladesh, mainly in telecommunications, power generation and road transport.

According to an official source, total bilateral trade stands at US\$165 million annually. The trade is in favour of Malaysia which exported commodities worth over US\$125 million to Bangladesh last year.

Malaysia's major exports to Bangladesh are palm oil and palm oil products and also various consumer items. Bangladesh exports jute and jute goods, frozen shrimp and fish and few other items to Malaysia.

Abul Hasan Chowdhury also referred to the large number of Bangladeshi workers employed in Malaysia. "I am sure these people are contributing to the economy of both of our countries."

According to official statistics, over 150,000 Bangladeshi workers are presently employed in Malaysia.

Sheikh Hasina's entourage will include Labour and Manpower Minister M.A.Mannan who is likely to discuss with Malaysia the possibility of recruiting more Bangladeshi workers.

A senior Bangladesh Foreign Ministry official told Bernama that Sheikh Hasina and Dr Mahathir Mohamad would in their official talks cover the entire gamut of bilateral relations as well as regional and international issues of common concern.

Bangladesh and Malaysia, who are both members of the OIC, NAM, D-8, Commonwealth and other international fora, have identical views on regional and international issues.

"Matters relating to expansion of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries and providing incentives to the Malaysian entrepreneurs for more investment in Bangladesh are likely to figure prominently in the discussion between the two leaders", the official said.

A 30-member business delegation, comprising prominent Bangladeshi businessmen and entrepreneurs, will accompany Sheikh Hasina to Kuala Lumpur.

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