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Sheikh Hasina here for four-day official visit

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PRIME Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina Wajed starts her first official visit to Malaysia today to further strengthen bilateral relationships.

During her four-day visit, she will be accompanied by a 73-member delegation comprising senior officials, staff members, correspondents and businessman.

Among the members of the delegation are Bangladeshi Minister of Labour and Employment MA Mannan and State Minister of Foreign Affairs Abul Hassan Chowdhury.

Wisma Putra said in a statement that Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to meet her Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and has a bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister today.

The two leaders are expected to discuss and exchange views on various bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Bilateral relations between Malaysia and Bangladesh continue to be closed and cordial and have expanded into areas such as defence, information and technical cooperation.

The close relations were shown by the frequent exchange of Ministerial and high ranking official visits between the two countries.

Last year, besides the Prime Minister's visit in March, Minister of Foreign Affairs Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Minister of Transport Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and the speakers of Parliament had also visited Bangladesh.

While in Malaysia, Sheikh Hasina is expected to attend a business luncheon organised by the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia, visit to the Multimedia Development Corporation and the Petronas Twin Tower.

The Bangladeshi delegation will also take a trip to the legend island, Pulau Langkawi. Sheikh Hasina is also scheduled to meet the Yang DiPertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah and the Queen, Tuanku Siti Aisyah.

Malaysia is ranked as the third largest investor after the US and UK in Bangladesh. At present, there are 33 Malaysian companies registered with the Bangladesh Board of Investment.

As at last December 31, Malaysia's investment in Bangladesh is estimated at US\$1.32 billion (US\$1= RM3.80) and it is mainly in telecommunications, transport, education, power generation, oil and gas, petro-chemical, data software, furniture and agro-based industries.

In 1999, Malaysia's total trade with Bangladesh were at RM534.8 million. The balance of trade was in Malaysia's favour with exports amounted to RM507.2 million and imports stood at RM27.6 million.

Palm oil is Malaysia's main export item, constituting 15.7 per cent of the total export. Other major export items are ships, boats and fishing structures, textile yarn, lime cement and fabricated construction materials, zinc and polishing preparations.

Malaysia's main import items from Bangladesh are crustaceans and molluscs, which constitute 36.2 per cent of the country total imports. Other major import items include photographic apparatus and equipment, commodities, fish sacks and bags made of jute.

Malaysia and Bangladesh also have a close cooperation in the field of education, maritime transport, tourism, agriculture and information. Both countries have so far signed 11 agreements in these areas.

Under the Malaysian Technical Programme, Malaysia has provided training

awards and scholarships for 244 Bangladeshi officials.

In addition, Malaysia, under the third party funding arrangement, has sponsored 140 officials from Bangladesh for various study tours and attachment programmes in the country.

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