

M'sia and Myanmar agree to new trade arrangement

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PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia and Myanmar have agreed to minimise the use of foreign exchange in trade between the two countries.

The decision was reached in discussions between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his counterpart from Myanmar Senior General Than Shwe here yesterday.

Briefing newsmen about the meeting later, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said under the new arrangement, trade between the two countries would be "set off" against each other, leaving only the balance to be paid in foreign exchange.

The arrangement is expected to result in increased trade between the two Asean countries, he said.

"It will also lessen the burden of either country which does not have sufficient foreign exchange," he added.

Syed Hamid said the two leaders also witnessed the signing of two memorandums of understanding on tourism co-operation and exchange of information.

He said Dr Mahathir and Gen Than Shwe discussed investment in areas like oil and gas, joint-venture in timber industry, paper and pulp, and fishing.

The Myanmar Prime Minister wanted more Malaysians to invest in his country, besides wanting more trade.

"The emphasis is on Asean countries to look at its market while exploring other markets.

"(They are) not to be dependent on one market as most Asean countries will be affected by the tragedy in the US," he said.

Asked if Dr Mahathir and Gen Than Shwe talked about democracy in Myanmar, Syed Hamid said the Prime Minister congratulated his counterpart on various steps taken to move the country "back into the mainstream."

"But at the same time, it is important that they do it at their own pace. We as a member of Asean would like Myanmar moving to the mainstream, and not subjected to problems regarding the political scenario in the country," he added.

Gen Than Shwe is scheduled to visit the Multimedia Development Corporation at Cyberjaya and the Petronas Twin Towers, before attending a lunch hosted by the National Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia today.

He will then depart for Langkawi to attend a dinner hosted by the Kedah Government.