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Vajpayee-Arrival

INDIAN PRIME MINISTER VAJPAYEE ARRIVES FOR FOUR-DAY VISIT

By: R.Ravichandran

SEPANG, May 13 (Bernama) -- Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee arrived here today for a four-day visit to boost economic ties and enhance cooperation in various fields between his country and Malaysia with which it has a long history of cultural and trade links.

The special Air India jetliner carrying the Indian leader and his 135-member delegation which includes the country's top 75 captains of industries landed at the KL International Airport (KLIA) here at about 6.30pm.

On hand to receive Vajpayee were Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and Deputy Information Minister Datuk Khalid Yunus who is the Minister-in-Attendance. Also present was India's High Commissioner to Malaysia Veena Sikri.

On alighting from the plane, Vajpayee was also greeted by a group of children who waved the Malaysian and Indian flags as they sang the song "Rasa Sayang."

Three officers and 31 men under the command of Captain Roslan Mohamad struck the "one-side guard-song" as the Prime Minister walked along the red carpet.

Vajpayee's entourage includes Information Technology Minister Pramod Mahajan and the Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Omar Abdullah.

The last Indian Prime Minister to visit Malaysia was P.V.Narasimha Rao in 1995. Other Indian leaders who had visited Malaysia in the past include the late Jawarhalal Nehru, the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and former Prime Minister Visvanath Pratap Singh.

Vajpayee's visit was supposed to have taken place in early February but was deferred following the devastating earthquake in the west Indian state of Gujarat.

The visit to Malaysia, is the first for the 75-year-old Indian leader who took over as Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy in October 1999, following the victory of his Bharatiya Janata Party led National Democratic Alliance.

The visit comes at a time when both countries enjoy very strong economic ties with many Malaysian companies undertaking contracts worth billion of ringgit involving mostly road and infrastructure projects in India.

India which is the biggest importer of Malaysian palm oil is also Malaysia's largest trading partner in South Asia. India's bilateral trade with Malaysia amounted to US\$2.491 billion during 1999-2000 period, registering a growth of about 29 per cent over the previous year.

Since introducing economic liberalisation in 1991, India with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US\$375 billion and over 1 billion people has today become one of the most promising emerging markets in Asia.

Tomorrow, Vajpayee will call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Putrajaya and exchange views on bilateral, regional and international issues. Prior to that Vajpayee will be accorded an official welcome at Putrajaya, the country's administrative capital.

Vajpayee will also witness the signing of bilateral agreements and a Memorandum of Understanding in the area of IT cooperation, free visa travel, tourism as well avoidance of double taxation. Dr Mahathir will host a dinner for Vajpayee at Seri Perdana, Putrajaya, tomorrow.

On Tuesday, Vajpayee will deliver a keynote address at the

India-Malaysia Business Forum at the Putra World Trade Centre to be attended by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

On Wednesday, the Indian leader will speak on "India and Asean:Shared Perspectives" at a function organised by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations.

India and Malaysia are members of the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Asean Regional Forum (ARF), among others.

Despite his busy schedule, Vajpayee will take the opportunity to visit the world's tallest buildings, the Petronas Twin Towers and the Malaysia-India Technology Exhibition at PWTC and take a "city drive" in Kuala Lumpur.

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