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Mahathir-Colombia

MALAYSIA TO HELP COLOMBIA DEVELOP AGRICULTURE

KUALA LUMPUR, March 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has expressed willingness to assist Colombia in implementing its socio-economic development programme, including sharing expertise in agriculture.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad conveyed this to visiting Colombian President Andres Pastrana Arango, according to Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

The prime minister called on Pastrana at his hotel suite here today and held talks for 45 minutes.

Briefing reporters later, Syed Hamid said Pastrana told Dr Mahathir that Colombia wanted to learn from Malaysia's socio-economic development programme.

"They want to get out of the current position of people planting cocaine. They want to look at alternative crops, they want to look at oil palm plantation and what type of land schemes that we have in order to alleviate poverty," Syed Hamid said.

Colombia, ravaged by a war pitting leftist rebels against the army and outlawed right-wing paramilitary groups, reportedly produces some 500 tonnes of cocaine every year.

Pastrana, who arrived today with a 62-member delegation for a four-day state visit, is scheduled to visit the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda) headquarters here for a briefing on the agency's functions and accomplishments.

Syed Hamid said Colombia was also interested in sharing Malaysia's experience in combating communist insurgency.

Pastrana invited the Malaysian private sector to participate in the republic's development given both countries' similarity in terms of weather and soil conditions, said Syed Hamid.

In response, Dr Mahathir said the Malaysian private sector would be interested if Colombia could assure security and safety, Syed Hamid added.

-- BERNAMA

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