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Malaysia-Iraq

MALAYSIANS ON PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP FLIGHT TO IRAQ

SEPANG, June 13 (Bernama) -- A 300-strong Malaysian delegation led by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar left for Iraq today on a three-day peace and friendship visit to the country devastated by UN sanctions.

The team which includes representatives of non-governmental organisations, government officials, businessmen and journalists, left on a Malaysia Airlines B747 jet from the KL International Airport here.

On hand to wish them a safe journey were Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

"We are going there to show our sympathies to the people of Iraq and to send a message to the UN Security Council that the sanctions against the country since 1991 should be lifted," Syed Hamid told reporters before the departure.

He said the Malaysians were taking with them medicine and essential items worth a few hundred thousand ringgit to be distributed to the people of Iraq.

Syed Hamid said the visit was a follow-up to a visit by Siti Hasmah with members of Bakti, the association of the wives of ministers and deputy ministers, in March last year.

He said the sanctions against Iraq had not achieved its target and instead was making the people, both young and old, to endure sufferings.

Syed Hamid commended the support given by the Malaysian private sector in making the trip a success.

He said the visit was also to renew bilateral ties between the two countries since his last visit a few years ago when he met President Saddam Hussein.

"This visit would also give us a chance to talk to Iraqi leaders and get a first-hand look at the condition of the country," he said.

Asked if the flight would be made an annual affair, he said this was not possible as even for this flight the government had to seek the consent of the UN.

"Furthermore we are not sure when the sanctions would end...the cost of such flights are also very high," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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