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PM's Yemen visit set to strengthen ties

Farush Khan in Sanaa

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahahtir Mohamad's arrival here yesterday for a four-day official visit to Yemen is set to strengthen trade ties between the Government of the two countries and their corporate sector.

While Malaysia expects to expand its export market and provide assistance in the civil service sector, Yemen is anxiously looking forward to learn the experience of Malaysia which it regards as a model of success in the Muslim world.

Besides Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, Dr Mahathir is joined by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain, Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob and Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

Dr Mahathir's special aircraft touched down at Sanaa International Airport at 6.50pm (11.50pm Malaysian time).

Also in his entourage were 46 executives from 31 Malaysian companies which have investments in Yemen.

Dr Mahathir will be meeting his Yemeni counterpart Abdul Kader Bajamal, followed by bilateral meetings and signing of two agreements (on Thursday).

The two agreements will be on the establishment of a joint commission to be headed by their respective foreign ministers, and the other is in the area of civil service corporation and training.

Yemen, with a population of 18 million people, lies in the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsular and is one of the most ancient countries and plays an important part in Middle Eastern trade.

The country also belongs to a geographical region which contains more than 25 per cent of the world's oil reserves and joined the rank of oil producing countries in 1984.

According to Syed Hamid, Malaysian businessmen, apart from looking at the oil industry, will also study the possibility of investing in port facilities and other businesses, including with other neighbouring countries like Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Tanzania.

The present trade exchange with Yemen stands at between RM70 million and RM200 million.

Syed Hamid, speaking to Malaysian reporters here, said Malaysia, through Petronas, will offer maintenance service for Yemen military aircraft.

"We hope a new contract will be signed for the repairs of the aircraft".

Dr Mahathir is also scheduled to have a dialogue with members of the Syura Council, Yemen ulamas and intellectuals.

He will pay a courtesy call on Ali Abdullah Salleh, President of Yemen and attend a lunch hosted by the president.

Dr Mahathir will leave for the port city of Aden Thursday where he will be received by the Governor Taha Ahmad Ghanam.

In Aden, he will meet representatives of the Yemen chambers of commerce and industry and businessmen.

With 500,000 people, Aden is the economic and commercial capital of Yemen.

On Friday, Dr Mahahtir is scheduled to visit Seiyon in Hadhramout and will proceed to Darul Mustapha Ta'arim where he is to meet with ulamas.

He leaves for Kampala, Uganda on Saturday.

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