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Prescott to visit Malaysia on Thursday

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BRITISH Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott will be in Malaysia for a three-day visit starting Thursday to further strengthen the already extremely good relationship between Malaysia and the UK.

Newly appointed British High Commissioner to Malaysia Bruce Cleghorn said Prescott is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Muhamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Friday.

"During the meetings, the British Deputy Prime Minister is expected to talk on the current world situation and major issues such as the US attack in Afghanistan as well as the conclusion of the trade round of the World Trade Organisation in Doha," he told Business Times and News Straits Times journalists.

Prescott is also expected to meet Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding to discuss the global environment issues.

"The meeting is timely as the World Summit on Sustainable Environment will be held in Johannesburg next year," Cleghorn said.

He said the British Deputy Prime Minister will also discuss on ways to improve bilateral relations between the two countries, in every sectors, including social and economics.

He said bilateral trade relations between the UK and Malaysia is holding up well despite the recent global recession.

"The two way trade has been on the increase despite the recession, with the trade balance in favour of Malaysia," he said.

Cleghorn said Malaysia's exports to the UK stood at RM8.8 billion in the first nine months of this year, while UK exported some RM4.4 billion worth of goods to Malaysia over the corresponding period.

"From this figure, it shows that Malaysia is consistently exceeding our exports here and we would like to see more Malaysians buying British goods.

"We are not worried about the trade balance but it is more important that trade in both directions grow.

This year, the British exports to Malaysia grew a little bit, while imports from Malaysia has fallen but the balance is still in Malaysia's favour," he said.

Cleghorn said trade between the two countries will pick up when the world economy improves next year.

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