

# PM and Khatami to have broad-based discussions

KOTA TINGGI: Discussions between Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and visiting Iranian President Seyed Mohammad Khatami are expected to be broad-based and will include the issues of terrorism and the use of the dinar for trade transaction.

Khatami's three-day visit, which begins today, will see five Memoranda of Understanding to be signed between both governments in the fields of tourism, information technology and multimedia as well as on double taxation.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the two leaders were expected to discuss the impact of terrorism and how the Organisation of Islamic Conference would tackle the issue without specific reference to Islam and Muslims.

He said the Prime Minister was expected to broach his idea of using the dinar as an alternative (to the universally-used US dollar) to settle trade transactions.

"We expect several interesting issues to be discussed, including the Palestine-Israel conflict, during Khatami's visit. The Iranian president has long voiced his interest to visit Malaysia and see the nation's progress," Syed Hamid told reporters after opening a new building block at Sekolah Agama Bandar here yesterday.

The visit, at the invitation of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail, will be Khatami's first to the country.

The last visit by an Iranian head of state was by President Akhbar Hashem Rafsanjani in 1994.

Khatami will be accompanied by his wife, Zohreh Khatami Sadeghi, and a 91-member delegation, which includes five ministers and five deputy ministers.

During his visit, the Iranian leader will attend a dialogue on civilisation organised by the Institute of Strategy and International Studies and will be feted to a luncheon hosted by the Malaysian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Asked if Khatami's visit would sour ties between Malaysia and the United States, which regards Iran as an "axis of evil", Syed Hamid said Kuala Lumpur was free to forge relations with whichever nation it chose for the benefit of the country.

He said Malaysia was working towards strengthening ties with the United States.