

03 MAY 2002
Syed Hamid-US
PM'S VISIT TO US TO ENHANCE BILATERAL TRADE

KUALA LUMPUR, May 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit to the United States on May 13 is aimed at strengthening bilateral trade and cooperation between Malaysia and the US.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar who said this today added that the US administration had shown the same interest as Malaysia to strengthen cooperation between the two countries, especially in the economy and trade.

He said that as a developing nation which played an active role in the summits of the Islamic countries and non-aligned nations, Malaysia could contribute important input to US President George W. Bush.

Dr Mahathir's discussion with the US president would also focus on the war against terrorism and the Palestinian issue, he told a news conference after opening the "Spiritual Edifices of Islam Exhibition" at the Islamic Arts Museum, here.

Besides Bush, Dr Mahathir is also scheduled to meet US Secretary of State Colin Powell, National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice and Asian Business Council representatives during the two-day visit.

US ambassador to Malaysia Marie T. Huhtala said after the launch that the relationship between Malaysia and the US was getting very close and very good.

"We particularly appreciate the strong cooperation on the terrorism issue, and I'm sure that it would be the main topic they (Dr Mahathir and Bush) will talk about," she said.

Earlier, in her speech, Huhtala said Dr Mahathir and Bush would be building on the strong foundation of US-Malaysian friendship during the prime minister's visit to US.

"Malaysia is a strong ally in the global struggle against intolerance and terrorism, and my government greatly appreciates the support,

"I hope all of you will enjoy this unique celebration of Islamic architecture and use this opportunity to learn more about Islam in the United States, just as Americans today are learning more about Islam," she said.

Huhtala said US bookstores had found it hard to keep books about Islam, including copies of the Quran, in stock and among the most popular new subjects at America's universities now were Islamic Studies, Middle Eastern Studies and Arabic.

"Islam is now America's fastest growing faith with more than six million adherents currently living in the US and thousands of new believers coming to US every year.

"There are already over 1,200 mosques in America, some over 130 years old, but more than 60 per cent were built since 1980," she said.

The month-long exhibition displays 33 graphics of famous mosques throughout the world produced by the late Wahbi Al-Hariri Rifai.

The collection, loaned from the GDG Exhibit Trust, Washington DC, shows various geographical sites spanning 12 centuries and under various Islamic dynasties.

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