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Mahathir-Pakistan

DR MAHATHIR IN PAKISTAN FOR TWO-DAY VISIT

By: Azman Ujang

ISLAMABAD, Oct 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here Friday for a two-day visit to Pakistan, the world's second most populous Muslim nation.

The special Malaysian government Global Express Bombardier aircraft carrying Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, after a three-day visit to India touched down at the Islamabad International Airport at 10.10am amidst tight security.

He was received by Pakistan Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz, who is also Minister-in-attendance, during the visit which came two years after a visit to Malaysia by Pakistan President and Chief Executive Gen Pervez Musharraf.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to meet Musharraf tonight for discussions on bilateral and international issues where, according to a senior Pakistani official, Musharraf is looking forward to "benefiting from Dr Mahathir's experience and knowledge".

Pakistan High Commissioner to Malaysia Nasim Rana told Bernama that his country regarded the Malaysian Prime Minister not only as a leader of the Southeast Asian region and the Muslim world but also a world leader.

Rana said that although there would be no set agenda for the meeting between the two leaders, Pakistan was anxious to seek ways to address the bilateral trade imbalance now hugely in Malaysia's favour.

"Pakistan wants to explore more areas where Malaysia can tap Pakistani expertise in information communication technology (ICT), defence industry, agricultural products and halal meat, to reduce this imbalance now in Malaysia's favour by nine to one," he said.

Malaysia's exports to Pakistan of mainly palm oil average US\$450 million annually with imports of Pakistani goods at US\$50 million. Pakistan is the third largest importer of Malaysian palm oil.

Shorly after arrival, Dr Mahathir will be briefed on Pakistan's ICT industry by Science and Technology Minister Dr Atta-ur-Rahman at a meeting with ICT experts.

He will perform Friday prayers at the Faisal Mosque before attending a dialogue with Pakistani businessmen.

The prime minister will witness the signing of two agreements between Malaysian and Pakistani companies -- for the construction of a liquid cargo jetty for palm oil between Pelda Holdings Sdn Bhd and Pasim Port Authority and a counter-trade pact between Jawala Corporation and its local partners.

Dr Mahathir will also inaugurate the Liberty power plant, a RM1.8 billion gas-powered project built and run by Malaysia's Tenaga Nasional Berhad that stands as the biggest Malaysian investment in Pakistan.

The Mahathir-Musharraf meeting is scheduled for 90 minutes at the president's office before both leaders witness the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Malaysia's Multimedia Development Corporation and Pakistan Software Export Board on ICT.

The two leaders will hold a joint news conference tonight before Musharraf hosts a dinner for the Malaysian delegation which includes Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

Dr Mahathir will leave for Riyadh early Saturday morning for a visit to Saudi Arabia.

-- BERNAMA

AU AHH JK