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Mahathir-Meeting

DR MAHATHIR MEETS WITH MYANMAR PRIME MINISTER

By: Rohana Mustaffa

YANGON, Aug 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad held a meeting with the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council Senior General Than Shwe shortly after arriving here for a two-day working visit.

The meeting was held at the parliament building and he was later feted to a dinner at the same place which was also attended by the wife of the Myanmar Prime Minister, Mrs Than Shwe and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

At the meeting, both leaders exchanged views on bilateral issues of mutual benefits especially on trade and investment as well as regional and international issues.

At a media conference before Dr Mahathir's arrival here today, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Prime Minister's visit was to update political and economic relations with Myanmar after implementation of the reconciliation process.

"The Prime Minister wants to seek information personally on the situation here as he is seen as a bullish leader with regard to Myanmar not only at the regional but also international level, and we are a strong supporter of Myanmar joining Asean," he said.

As such, the developments here had become of great significance especially because the United Nations' special envoy Tan Sri Razali Ismail is a Malaysian national and had mediated in making the discussion between the Myanmar government and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi a reality, said Syed Hamid.

He also said that Dr Mahathir's visit was to look at how to strengthen cooperation in various economic fields because Malaysia was a major investor and trade partner here and had occupied the top position by pioneering in numerous investments in Myanmar before.

However, many Malaysian investors were trapped by the financial crisis in 1997 and 1998, prompting the Prime Minister to take measures again to encourage investors to venture in the fields identified as having good potential after the economic recovery, he said.

Malaysia is now in fourth position in terms of trading volume with Myanmar which totalled RM1.045 billion last year, after Singapore, United Kingdom and Thailand.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia considered trade with Myanmar just as important as those of the other Asean member countries because Malaysia's trade volume with Asean countries constituted 26 per cent.

Malaysia also wanted to ensure Myanmar was pursuing capacity building as was being done by the other new Asean member countries -- Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia -- in preparing themselves together with the older member nations to enter the regional and global markets, he said.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir was leading a 300-member delegation which did not include those attending the the Myanmar-Malaysia Technology Conference organised by the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MiGHT) and SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) tomorrow.

This demonstrated Malaysia's seriousness in ensuring that the working visit, which was part of a series of visits by both leaders, would meet with great success, he said.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia was satisfied with Myanmar's door opening process which would create a conducive environment for investors.

In view of Dr Mahathir's tight schedule, a question was posed whether there was any possibility of a meeting with Suu Kyi as was anticipated by several quarters, to which Syed Hamid said that any request by Suu Kyi for a meeting should be made through the Myanmar government.

This was a working visit and as an invited guest, it was up to the Myanmar government to arrange the itinerary and inform Dr Mahathir of any meeting arranged, he added.

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