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PM to launch trade initiative with Thailand

PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - The Malaysia-Thailand Chamber of Commerce, a fresh initiative to enhance trade between the two nations, will be officially opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his two-day visit to Thailand beginning tomorrow.

Dr Mahathir, on his first official trip abroad since announcing his impending resignation, will also give a luncheon talk for Malaysian and Thai businessmen.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Dr Mahathir would leave from Alor Star tomorrow for an unofficial meeting with Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in Chiang Mai.

"The next day (Saturday) Dr Mahathir will depart for Bangkok for an official meeting with Thaksin," Syed Hamid said during a briefing at Wisma Putra today.

The two leaders are expected to discuss wide-ranging bilateral matters, including the Petronas gas pipeline project, border issues and the setting up of the Asean + 3 secretariat in Malaysia.

Syed Hamid said that the institutionalisation of Asean + 3, a suggestion mooted by Dr Mahathir, had so far received positive response from almost all Asean members, plus China, South Korea and Japan.

"We are of the view that the time now is right to push for the implementation."

"Thailand has shown interest to be part of the pact," he said.

Dr Mahathir will be accompanied by his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Syed Hamid, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and Agriculture Minister Datuk Effendi Norwawi.

Also in the delegation are Armed Forces chief Jen Tan Sri Zahidi Zainuddin, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai, Petronas president Tan Sri Hassan Marican and Economic Planning Unit director-general Datuk Iskandar Dzakurnain Badarudin.

The Prime Minister and his delegation will return home on Sunday.