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Mahathir-Visit

PM TO VISIT MOROCCO, LIBYA AND BAHRAIN TO ENHANCE TIES

PUTRAJAYA, April 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will visit Morocco, Libya and Bahrain next week to boost Malaysia's ties with the three countries, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

"The intention is to enhance bilateral relations and see what areas of economic cooperation that can be strengthened with these countries," he told reporters after meeting Dr Tatsuo Arima, the Special Envoy of Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, at his office here.

Syed Hamid said that Dr Mahathir's trip to Morocco and Bahrain was actually to reciprocate the visit of his counterparts while his visit to Libya was at the invitation of its leader, Muammar Gaddafi.

Dr Mahathir's visit to the North African states of Morocco and Libya and the Persian Gulf state of Bahrain is scheduled for April 15-21. He will be accompanied by some 100 Malaysian businessmen.

Syed Hamid said that Malaysia hoped to forge closer economic relations with the three countries as there were still a lot of business opportunities that could be explored by Malaysian companies.

As of last year, Malaysia's trade with Bahrain accounted for 0.05 per cent of its total world trade while that with Morocco and Libya were lower, at 0.01 per cent and 0.003 per cent respectively.

Syed Hamid noted that there were already Malaysian companies participating in the economic activities of these countries, with the most notable being Petronas, the national oil corporation.

Petronas is already involved in a concession to explore oil in the Libyan-Tunisian border and has been awarded two exploration blocks in Bahrain.

He also said that as part of Dr Mahathir's visit to Bahrain, the prime minister would also be opening a Malaysia Trade Exhibition Centre in the state capital of Manama.

The centre was set up not only to increase exports and enhancing bilateral trade with Bahrain but also to serve as a launch pad to penetrate the potentially large West Asian market.

Asked whether the issue of escalating tension in Palestine would be touched during Dr Mahathir's meeting with the leaders of the three countries, Syed Hamid said that he would only say that current political issues would normally be discussed when leaders meet.

-- BERNAMA

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