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Myanmar-Mahathir

MALAYSIA AND MYNMAR TO SIGN TWO MOU'S DURING DR MAHATHIR'S VISIT

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 16 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Mynmar are set to sign two memorandums of understanding (MoU) during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's two-day visit to the Southeast Asian country from Sunday, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

The two MoU's are an offshore oil exploration contract agreement between the national oil company, Petronas, and Myanmar's Ministry of Energy and of an undertaking for a study on the construction of mini-hydro plants at the Nga Moe Yeik and Tabuhla dams between Tepat Teknik Sdn Bhd and the Myanmar's Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Besides his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Dr Mahathir's 300-strong delegation will include International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie, Syed Hamid, senior government officials and businessmen from the private sector.

"We hope that this will be a very constructive (visit)...and will further enhance the relationship between Malaysia and Myanmar and we will continue to play a role to see whatever way to assist them," Syed Hamid told the media at Wisma Putra, here.

He said three more tentative MoU's -- on the export of steel, telecommunications and the Yangon city development -- were also on the cards but were not confirmed for signing.

Dr Mahathir's visit is at the invitation of the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Senior General Than Shwe and is also to reciprocate Than Shwe's visit to Malaysia in September last year. Kuala Lumpur and Yangon established diplomatic relations in 1958.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir and Than Shwe would also exchange views on bilateral issues of mutual interest especially on trade and investment and matters pertaining to regional and international issues.

Dr Mahathir's tight schedule includes a keynote address at the Malaysia-Myanmar Technology Conference, jointly organised by the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (Might) and the State Peace and Development Council in collaboration with the Malaysian External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) and Institute Sultan Iskandar.

With some RM2.23 billion investment, largely in timber processing, hotel, tourism, trading, mining, agriculture and manufacturing, Malaysia is currently the fourth largest foreign investor in Myanmar, after Singapore, the United Kingdom and Thailand.

Malaysia's total trade with Myanmar last year amounted to RM1.045 billion with exports to Myanmar totalling RM748.6 million while imports were valued at RM297.1 million with the balance of trade in Malaysia's favour.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir would also have a dialogue with Malaysians living in Myanmar during his visit.

Describing Malaysia-Myanmar relations as "warm and cordial" he said that currently about 200 Myanmar nationals were undergoing short courses under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP). About 16,000 Myanmars are also working legally in Malaysia, mainly in the construction and garment sectors.

Replying to a question, Syed Hamid said that there was no plan for a meeting between Dr Mahathir and Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"At present we have no such plan and of course we follow very closely the work undertaken by Tan Sri Razali Ismail and we are happy with the development that is taking place in Myanmar...the reconciliation process..they are moving at a pace they are comfortable with and towards democratisation," he said.

Razali, who is the United Nations special envoy for Myanmar, brokered talks between the Myanmar government and Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy aimed at promoting national reconciliation which resulted in Suu Kyi's release from house arrest last May.

"Dr Mahathir has always been encouraging that...that for Myanmar to develop, they have to open up and find reconciliation. We are very glad that they have been very positive to our viewpoints," he said.

Syed Hamid was also asked whether a request had been made from Suu Kyi's side for a meeting with Dr Mahathir.

"I think if there is a request... whatever request made, it will be up to the (Myanmar government)...because this is a working visit. It is up to the Myanmar government to inform us but we have not received any request," he said.

"Malaysia's view is that we will do whatever is considered necessary and acceptable to the host government. And I think that as far as we are concerned we will meet with even Aung San Suu Kyi if that is what they (Myanmar government) organise for our prime minister but at present it is not in the programme," he said.

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