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North Korea-Visit

NORTH KOREA'S KIM YONG NAM TO VISIT MALAYSIA

KUALA LUMPUR, March 2 (Bernama) -- North Korea's President of the Presidium Supreme People's Assembly Kim Yong Nam will arrive here tomorrow for a three-day state visit aimed at expanding bilateral ties with Malaysia.

Kim, 75, will be North Korea's highest ranking leader to visit Malaysia since Kuala Lumpur and Pyongyang established diplomatic ties in 1973.

The Supreme People's Assembly is North Korea's top legislative body.

A North Korean embassy official told Bernama that Kim, who would arrive from Thailand after a similar visit, would discuss economic issues of mutual interest and explore ways to promote more economic cooperation between his country and Malaysia.

"Malaysia and North Korea enjoy very friendly relations," the official, who declined to be named, said.

Kim's 30-member delegation will include Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun; Foreign Trade Minister Ri Kwang-Gun; Academy of Science President Ri Kwang Ho; and chairman of the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries Mun Jae Chol.

During the visit, North Korea and Malaysia are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding on, among others, economy and culture to be witnessed by Kim and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Both leaders will also lead their respective countries at the bilateral meeting on Monday.

Despite ideological differences, the friendly relations between the two countries have grown steadily with Malaysia offering North Korea palm oil credit and payment arrangement facility of US\$10 million (RM38 million) and also 30 places for North Koreans to undergo training under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP).

Besides extending humanitarian aid to North Korea which was badly hit by drought and floods in recent years, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, during his visit to North Korea last June, also offered Malaysia's help to train North Koreans in information technology.

Both countries signed an agreement on the partial abolition of visa in April 2000 to help pave the way for more social and business visits. In 1999, about 500 Malaysians, mostly tourists and businessmen, visited North Korea.

"All these show that North Korea-Malaysia bilateral relations are getting better and stronger," the embassy official said.

Foreign news reports said that Kim's visit would focus on promoting investment for North Korea's special economic zone of Rajin-Sonbong and cooperation in the information technology area.

In 1999, Malaysia-North Korea total trade grew three-fold to RM29.65 million from RM9.66 million in 1998.

With some 22 million people, North Korea, covering an area of 120,540sq km, is the most centralised economy in the world.

Talks between Kim and Dr Mahathir are also expected to touch on current international issues and the latest development in the Korean peninsula.

Malaysia expressed its support for the North-South Korea Joint Declaration on peaceful reunification at the historic Inter-Korean Summit in Pyongyang attended by North Korean leader Kim Jong-il and South Korean President Kim Dae Jung two years ago.

The Korean peninsula was divided at the end of the Second World War

into North and South Korea and this was followed by the Korean War (1950-1953).

In recent years, North Korea has taken the initiative to normalise ties with many Western countries and two years ago become the 23rd member of the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) which mainly discusses regional security issues.

According to a Wisma Putra statement here, Kim is scheduled to be accorded a state welcome on Monday.

He is scheduled to attend a state banquet hosted by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Putra Jamalullail, at Istana Negara.

Kim is also scheduled to tour the Proton manufacturing plant in Shah Alam and the Multimedia Development Corporation in Cyberjaya for a briefing on the Multimedia Super Corridor. He will also visit the Petronas Twin Towers, the world's tallest building.

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