

PM's Ukraine trip to open up trade potential

STAR 11-7-2003

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KUALA WMPUR: Ukraine is looking forward to the ground-breaking visit by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Sunday with great anticipation.

The Prime Minister will be the highest-ranking Malaysian official to travel to the former Soviet republic since diplomatic relations were established between both countries in March 1991.

Dr Mahathir's three-day trip is well timed as the Ukrainian Parliament has just ratified a trade agreement under which both nations will enjoy the "most favoured nation" trading status.

The agreement, signed during Ukrainian First Vice Prime Minister Oleg Dubina's visit here last August, is Ukraine's first such arrangement within South East Asia.

Ukraine's charge d'affaires here, Valentyn Velychko, said his Government and people were attaching much importance to Dr Mahathir's visit due to the great potential to be tapped in trade and commerce between both countries.

"With the "most favoured nation" privilege, Malaysian exporters will enjoy special treatment in Ukraine. For example, your vessels will receive preferential treatment

at our ports, and your goods will get certain Customs waivers.

"Malaysia has also enforced the agreement," he said in an interview before leaving for Kiev to prepare for Dr Mahathir's visit.

Dr Mahathir will be accorded an official welcome near Mariinskyi Palace on Monday morning and will later meet with President Leonid Kuchma, Prime Minister Victor Yanukovich and Speaker of Parliament Volodymyr Lytvyn.

He will then visit the Antonov aircraft plant. On Tuesday, Dr Mahathir will lead his dele-

gation to the port city of Odessa to witness a joint-venture signing ceremony between Malaysian and Ukrainian parties to build a transshipment complex there.'

He will also be briefed on the setting up of a Malaysia Trade Centre and tour the palm oil storage facilities there. His schedule also includes a visit to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, where he will also meet Malaysian students pursuing a medical degree at the Crimea State Medical University.

About 630 Malaysian students are enrolled in Ukrainian institutions, with most pursuing medical degrees.

Velychko said at present Malaysia only recognises degrees awarded by the Crimea State Medical University.

"We have about 20 medical universities and nine more have applied this year for the recognition of their degrees by Malaysia. Malaysians need wider study options in Ukraine," he said, suggesting that Malaysian institutions should consider tying up with the National Aviation University in Kiev.

On bilateral trade, he said there was much ground to cover, as the volume last year was only US\$83.1 mil (RM\$315mil).