

24 OCT 2003

Mahathir-PNG

DR MAHATHIR ARRIVES IN PNG FOR TWO-DAY VISIT

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

PORT MORESBY, Oct 24 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here Friday for a two-day visit that is set to open new avenues of cooperation between the two countries.

The prime minister, accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, was received by his Papua New Guinea counterpart, Sir Michael Somare and Lady Veronica, at the Jackson's International Airport, about 8km from here.

A 19-gun salute greeted the prime minister, who arrived after a productive three-day official visit to Dili as the first head of government to visit Timor Leste since its independence in May last year.

Dr Mahathir inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by the Royal PNG Constabulary and PNG Defence Force at the official welcoming ceremony. This is Dr Mahathir's third visit to PNG after being here in 1982 and 1984.

The official delegation comprised Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Works Minister Datuk Seri S.Samy Vellu, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali and Deputy Home Minister Datuk Zainal Abidin Zin.

They arrived earlier in a chartered flight government officials and a 40-member business delegation which had accompanied the prime minister to Timor Leste.

Dr Mahathir's programme today includes a one-on-one meeting with Sir Michael at the PNG Prime Minister's office where they will exchange views on issues of mutual interest. This will be followed by a delegation meeting.

The prime minister will also call on PNG Governor-General Sir Silas Atopare at the Government House before attending an official dinner hosted by Sir Michael a hotel here tonight.

Tomorrow, Dr Mahathir will meet the Malaysian community here before addressing the Malaysia-PNG Business Dialogue.

He leaves for home in the afternoon.

PNG, which celebrated its independence on Sept 16, 1975, has a population of about 5.1 million.

Its main economic activities are agriculture, mining, fishing, forestry, manufacturing and construction.

Dr Mahathir's visit was given prominence in PNG's two daily English language newspapers -- the National Newspaper and the Post-Courier -- with the latter publishing part of the prime minister's opening address at the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit in Putrajaya last Thursday.

The National published a 24-page special report to mark Dr Mahathir's visit to PNG, located just south of the Equator and 160km to the north of Australia.

In a statement to welcome Dr Mahathir, Sir Michael said his government would support further practical investments from Malaysian enterprises to complement the growth and development of trade and commercial relations between the two countries.

He said Malaysian investments in Papua New Guinea was expanding and continuing to provide employment for many Papua New Guineans.

"Malaysia has been the leading investor in Papua New Guinea over the

past decade with a total of 246 approved Malaysian enterprises conducting business between 1999 and 2003," he was quoted as saying by the National.

The two countries established diplomatic ties in 1976.

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