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Mahathir-Syria

DR MAHATHIR TO MEET PRESIDENT BASHAR AL-ASSAD IN DAMASCUS

By: Mokthar Hussain

DAMASCUS, Aug 16 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will arrive in this capital city of Syria tomorrow for a two-day visit where issues on bilateral cooperation and the situation in West Asia and Iraq are expected to be high on the agenda during talks with President Dr Bashar Al-Assad.

The Prime Minister will be a leading a 70-member delegation comprising Cabinet ministers, Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers as well as corporate leaders from 22 companies including Proton, the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC), Ranhill, Airod and Puncak Niaga Holding.

Dr Mahathir earlier visited Algeria and Swaziland.

While here, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to witness the signing of several agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) for cooperation in the fields of science and technology as well as in manufacturing and know-how transfer.

After a formal meeting with President Al-Assad, Dr Mahathir will co-chair a delegation meeting with Syrian Prime Minister Mustapha Mero with discussions, among others, expected to touch on prospects for investment and efforts to increase the volume of trade between the two countries.

Trade between both countries stood at about RM200 million, in Malaysia's favour, with imports from Syria merely amounting to RM3 million, mainly textiles.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said that Dr Mahathir's visit to Syria was at the invitation of Presiden Al-Assad.

"President Al-Assad sees Malaysia as the only country that can combine Islam and modernization as well as keen on the development of information technology (IT) as Syria intends to develop its technology park, to be called 'technoport'," he told Malaysian journalists here.

Syed Hamid said that Malaysian brands had begun to penetrate the Syrian market with the import of 175 Proton and Perodua Kancil cars especially after Malaysia set up its embassy in Damascus last year following the setting up of the Syrian embassy in Kuala Lumpur the previous year.

On Monday, Dr Mahathir will inaugurate Proton's showroom in Harasta and meet Malaysian students studying in Syria.

The Syrian Arab Republic, with a total land area of 185,180 sq km, borders Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. It has a population of 17 million with some 40,000 people living in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Dr Mahathir's tight schedule in Damascus will include a meeting with Syrian Islamic leaders and dialogues with businessmen as well as politicians, Cabinet ministers and think-tanks of the Syrian government.

-- BERNAMA

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