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Mahathir-Algeria

DR MAHATHIR TO VISIT ALGERIA, SWAZILAND AND SYRIA

By: Mokhtar Hussein

ALGIERS, Aug 9 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will embark on a nine-day visit to Algeria, Swaziland and Syria on Sunday with enhancing South-South cooperation and improving the flow of information top on his agenda.

The Prime Minister is scheduled to arrive in this Algerian capital on Sunday evening with Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

Dr Mahathir will be leading a delegation comprising Cabinet ministers, Menteri Besar and businessmen during the three-day official visit.

Besides a four-eye meeting with Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the Prime Minister will also witness the signing of agreements on trade and exchange of news between the Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama) and its Algerian counterpart, the Algerie Presse Service (APS).

The news exchange agreement is part of a move to realise the idea of the South-South Information Gateway (SSIG) which was mooted by Dr Mahathir during the 1999 Langkawi International Dialogue (LID).

Algeria, located in the north of Africa, is the second largest country in the continent after Sudan, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Morocco and Tunisia.

It covers a land area of 2,381,740 sq km and is rich with natural resources especially petroleum and natural gas. The former French colony gained independence in 1962 and has an estimated population of 32 million.

Wisma Putra officials said that Dr Mahathir will also attend a Malaysia-Algeria Business Dialogue before departing for Swaziland for a four-day working visit to attend the South African International Dialogue (Said), from Wednesday to Saturday.

The Prime Minister will then proceed to Damascus for the final leg of his visit.

There, he will meet Syrian President Dr Bashar Al-Assad and their talks are expected to touch on the situation in West Asia and the post-war era in neighbouring Iraq.

During the invasion of Iraq, Malaysia had expressed deep concern over the US intentions to attack Syria, saying that any attack would only lead to another disaster.

It was also reported that Malaysia could play its role in getting support from the Non-Alligned Movement (NAM) and Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) member countries for Syria's motion that West Asia is free from weapons of mass destruction.

While in Damascus, Dr Mahathir is also scheduled to meet Islamic scholars (ulamas) in Syria and Malaysian students studying in Syria.

Bilateral ties between Malaysia and Syria have improved and visits by government leaders have cemented several deals like the opening of the Malaysian embassy last February.

-- BERNAMA

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