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Mahathir-Brazil

DR MAHATHIR BEGINS FOUR-DAY VISIT TO BRAZIL ON SUNDAY

By: Mokhtar Hussain

BRASILIA, March 15 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will arrive in Brazil's capital city on Sunday for a four-day official visit to further enhance bilateral ties.

The Prime Minister, who is currently on two months' vacation abroad, will be arriving from the Manaus resort town in central Amazon with his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Briefing Malaysian journalists, here, Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad said Dr Mahathir's visit, his second since 1991, was at the invitation of the newly-elected President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Besides Dr Toyad, the 31-member delegation from Malaysia include Foreign Ministry Deputy Secretary-General Datuk Abd Aziz Mohammad, Malaysia's Ambassador to Brazil Ban Kat Meng and senior officials from the Prime Minister's Department and the Foreign Ministry.

According to Dr Toyad, Dr Mahathir and President Lula would discuss regional and international issues such as globalisation, terrorism, impending war on Iraq and bilateral trade between the two countries.

"It is also an opportunity to discuss with the new president issues relating to our relations with Brazil at international forums such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Group of 15 (G-15) developing countries.

"The two leaders may also talk on common issues such as Malaysia's experience in poverty eradication and tackling the financial crisis," he said.

Lula, 58, took office on Jan 1, 2003 after securing a 61 per cent vote in the presidential election in October last year. His victory had brought a new dream for the poor and marginalised as Lula himself was a former metal worker, who migrated from Brazil's impoverished northeast and worked as a shoeshine boy.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah would also attend a luncheon hosted by the Brazilian President at his palace.

On bilateral trade, Malaysia is Brazil's biggest trading partner in Asean while Brazil is Malaysia's second largest in Latin America after Mexico.

Dr Toyad said the three main Malaysian investors in Brazil are Supemaxx Import Adora SA, which distributes rubber gloves and other rubber products, Abric SA, which manufactures seal for containers and trucks and Amaplac SA Ind. de Madires which is involved in the plywood industry, with a combined investment of about US\$18.8 million.

Sugar, soyabean and recently military weapons make up about 50 per cent of Malaysia's total imports from Brazil, he said.

Malaysia purchased its Artillery Saturation Rocket System from Avibras Aerospacial in October last year.

He said Malaysia's major exports to Brazil include electronic, television and radio parts, semiconductors and computers together with its components.

On Tuesday, Dr Mahathir is expected to visit a commercial and military aircraft manufacturer and Avibras Aerospacial, the manufacturer of air-to-ground and surface weapon systems in San Jose, near Sao Paulo.

From there, Dr Mahathir will fly to Rio de Janeiro before leaving for Kuala Lumpur the next day.

Brazil, located in the central eastern of South America, is about 26

times bigger than Malaysia with an estimated population of 176 million.

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