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Syed Hamid-Ukraine

MALAYSIA KEEN TO FORGE CLOSE COOPERATION WITH UKRAINE

By: Mohd Kamel Othman

KIEV (Ukraine), July 13 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar has said Malaysia is keen to forge close ties and cooperation with Ukraine, especially in trade and tourism.

He said Malaysia was looking for partners with whom it could cooperate closely in new technological fields, and Ukraine had been identified as one country with potential.

"Ukraine has many places of interest which would enable us to establish close cooperation in the tourism industry. We also want to encourage Ukrainians to visit Malaysia," he told Malaysian journalists covering Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's four-day official visit to Ukraine beginning Sunday.

Dr Mahathir is the first Malaysian prime minister to visit the former Soviet republic since the two countries established diplomatic relations in March 1991.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia was also interested in establishing cooperation with Ukraine in the field of education, and defence and palm oil industries.

"That is why four ministers -- I myself, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohammad -- are joining this visit," he said.

Syed Hamid said Ukraine was one of the countries with expertise in the defence industry and biotechnology.

Dr Mahathir would be visiting leading centres of Ukraine's shipping and aviation industries, and it was hoped that the visit would be fruitful, he said.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir would be discussing bilateral ties and regional and international issues with President Leonid D. Kuchma and Prime Minister Victor Yanukovic.

The prime minister would also invite Kuchma to visit Malaysia, he said.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia was prepared to consider opening its representative office in Ukraine.

"We do not have an embassy here and for now our ambassador in Poland is concurrently accredited to Ukraine," he said.

Ukraine opened its representative office in Kuala Lumpur in August last year.

On cooperation between entrepreneurs of the two countries, Syed Hamid said the relationship was now only focused on the defence industry.

Thirty businessmen are accompanying Dr Mahathir on the visit to explore business opportunities.

In Odessa, south of Kiev, there was a major palm oil storage facility which Malaysia could use to market the commodity to the Eastern European market, he said.

"Ukraine during the Russian (Soviet) era was a region producing tanks and MiG fighter jet equipment and was one of the countries we bought (equipment) from," he said.

Syed Hamid said fertilisers account for 41 percent of Malaysia's imports from Ukraine. Malaysia's imports from Ukraine in 2002 totalled RM160 million.

He said there was also potential for cooperation in the education sector, noting that there are now some 600 Malaysian students in Ukraine,

mostly pursuing medical courses.

Of this number, only 12 are sponsored by the Public Service Department and two by Mara.

-- BERNAMA

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