

19 JAN 2004

Abdullah-Laos

ABDULLAH IN LAOS FOR ONE-DAY VISIT

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

VIENTIANE, Jan 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad

Badawi arrived here this morning on the fifth leg of his "courtesy call" to

Asean capitals after assuming office on Oct 31.

He was met on arrival at the Wattay International Airport by Laotian

Deputy Prime Minister Somsavat Lengsavad and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri

Syed Hamid Albar who arrived last night.

This is the first visit to Laos by a Malaysian prime minister since

this country of five million people joined Asean in July 1997.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was here in 1994. Soon

after his arrival, Abdullah headed for the welcoming ceremony at the National Assembly where he was greeted by his Laotian counterpart, Bounnhang Vorachith.

Abdullah is scheduled to hold talks with Vorachith at the Prime Minister's office, followed with a courtesy call on President Khamtay Siphandone at the Presidential Palace.

Vorachith, who visited Malaysia in 2001, will host a luncheon in honour of Abdullah at the Lao Plaza Hotel. Abdullah will later meet the Malaysian community working in Laos at the hotel.

He will then witness the signing ceremony between Exim Bank of Malaysia and the Sun Holdings Co Ltd.

Abdullah is scheduled to leave for Manila at 4 pm local time.

Abdullah's "familiarisation trip" has taken him to Bandar Seri Begawan, Jakarta, Singapore and Bangkok.

He is scheduled to visit Phnom Penh, Hanoi and Yangon next week to complete the circle.

His visit to Laos is significant as Abdullah, then foreign minister, had chaired the Asean Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 1997 that witnessed the admission of Laos and Myanmar as the eighth and ninth member.

Cambodia joined the fold two years later.

Since joining the 10-nation entity, Laos -- the only landlocked member

-- has participated significantly in its activities, and it is hosting the Asean Tourism Forum from Jan 30 to Feb 7 and the Asean Summit, the annual meeting of Asean leaders, in November.

-- BERNAMA

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