

Boosting relations with Italy

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PM to focus on bilateral and economic ties during three-day visit

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ROME: Malaysia hopes to expand trade with Italy which is now focused on defence procurement, said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

"Such an expansion of bilateral and economic ties will be the focus of the visit of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, which starts today.

"Our bilateral trade ties is at about US\$2bil (RM5bil) annually but it is focused on the purchase of defence equipment like patrol craft and radar.

"Italy is well known for its technological capabilities. "We are sure that we can widen our trade ties with them," Syed Hamid told Malaysia journalists covering Abdullah's visit here.

He said Abdullah's trip here was

also significant because this was the first official visit by a Malaysian Prime Minister to Italy in 25 years.

"Our ties with this European nation have always been good and this visit will surely boost the relations."

He added that Abdullah would be calling on Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi today.

"The two leaders know each other quite well and will touch on international affairs, especially the issues in West Asia, besides bilateral matters."

Syed Hamid said Italy was one of the European countries which had a major influence on West Asian affairs and Prodi would surely want to hear Abdullah's views.

Abdullah arrived here late yesterday and will leave on Tuesday.

He had earlier visited Russia and Bosnia Herzegovina.



Malaysia's priorities: Syed Hamid speaking to Malaysian journalists in Rome yesterday. — Bernama