

PM STARTS 3-DAY VISIT TO MANILA TODAY

Dr M to meet
Philippine
counterpart to
discuss ways to
boost bilateral ties

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PRIME Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad will meet Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte to discuss ways to strengthen bilateral ties as part of the former's three-day official visit to Manila today.

Dr Mahathir will be accompanied by his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, International Trade and Industry

Minister Datuk Darell Leiking and senior officers from the two ministries.

Dr Mahathir and the delegates were scheduled to arrive at Bulwagang Kalayaan, Villamor Air Base in Pasay City at 7.50pm (local time).

The Malaysian Embassy in the Philippines deputy chief of mission Rizany Irwan Muhamad Mazlan said the visit marked six decades of trade partnership and bilateral ties between the two countries.

"Dr Mahathir would be honoured in a state banquet at Malacanang Palace, following a wreath-laying ceremony at the Rizal Monument here on the second day of the visit on Thursday.

"Dr Mahathir will deliver a keynote address at the Malaysian-Philippine business forum, which will be attended by captains of industries from both countries," Rizany said at the em-

bassy here.

Themed "Partners for Progress, Brothers for Peace", the visit will mark Dr Mahathir's introductory visit to neighbouring Southeast Asian countries since he took office as the seventh prime minister.

It will be his third official visit to the Philippines, having previously visited the country as the premier in 1987 and 1994.

"The visit will provide opportunities for both leaders to strengthen bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries," he said.

Rizany said at the event, Dr Mahathir would meet with former Philippine president and house speaker Gloria Arroyo and Entrepreneurship Asean Business Advisory Council president Jose Maria A. Concepcion III.

"His visit would allow Malaysia to highlight the government's policies and its stand, particular-

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ly on issues of mutual concern," he said, adding that Dr Mahathir was scheduled to meet the Malaysian diaspora in the Philippines on the third day of the visit.

The anticipation over the visit gained momentum following the enactment of the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao last year.

Duterte's administration had, in July, approved the law, which would grant more autonomy to the country's predominantly Muslim region.

Malaysia has been a staunch supporter of the Mindanao peace process and had played a constructive role as the third party facilitator to ensure greater safety and stability in the Philippines and the region.

Malaysia's total trade with the Philippines increased by 8.8 per cent last year, from US\$5.93 billion in 2017 to US\$6.45 billion.

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RIZANY IRWAN MUHAMAD MAZLAN
Embassy of Malaysia in the Philippines deputy chief of mission

The Philippines is Malaysia's fourth largest trading partner among the Asean countries and the 15th largest trading partner in the world.