

PM'S VISIT SIGNALS NEW START IN KL, RIYADH TIES

Visit will enable both nations to move forward post-pandemic, says Hisham



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PRIME Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's official visit to Saudi Arabia symbolises a new begin-

ning in the relationship between

Malaysia and Saudi Arabia.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said the visit would enable both countries to resume their good relationship and build on the momentum to move forward post-Covid-19 and beyond.

"What we see happening today is symbolic of a lot of hard work that has been done for over a year since the change of government.

"Trust and sincerity are the

keys for this relationship to sustain. Although the foundation (of the relationship) between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia has always been strong, it is important for us to show commitment, trust and sincerity as we move forward.

"We hope to maintain this momentum, not only with Saudi Arabia, but also other countries in the region," he said after his arrival here yesterday.

He said the bilateral relationship between the two countries was important on many levels, including matters such as haj.

"To make sure that the relationship is on a sound foundation is one thing, but to move that level of confidence to another level, I hope the visit by the prime minister will be able to do that."

He said Muhyiddin's visit signified Malaysia's commitment to the relationship between the two nations.

Hishammuddin said the relationship had suffered a blow in the past.

"The relationship was not at a level that we had hoped for, but

both parties have shown a willingness to fix it." He said efforts to renew and rebuild the relationship began a year ago.

He said this was also the first time that a head of government was accorded an official visit to the kingdom following the historic Al Ula Conference on Jan 5.

He said Crown Prince Mohammed Salman Abdulaziz Al-Saud would personally welcome Muhyiddin, who was expected to arrive at the King Khalid International Airport last night.

"It was not in the original itinerary. His Royal Highness the Crown Prince has made the decision himself.

"The whole airport will be closed as HRH the Crown Prince wants to welcome Muhyiddin."

Hishammuddin said several substantive matters had been agreed upon ahead of the official programme at Al-Yamamah Palace today.

On the official welcoming ceremony at the palace, with Muhyiddin having a virtual audience with King Salman Abdulaziz Al-Saud, he said since the start of the pandemic, King Salman had not granted any physical audience with any government leader.

"As far as I know, even virtual

meetings have not been done before (with King Salman). If the meeting proceeds tomorrow (today) in a virtual manner, then that in itself is incredible in the current landscape of Covid-19.

"This shows the close relationship we have with the highest leadership in Saudi Arabia. For King Salman to have requested the Crown Prince to represent him to receive and hold discussions with the prime minister, that is something that I am very thankful for."

Muhyiddin's visit to Saudi Arabia from March 6 to Thursday is at the invitation of King Salman. Prior to his arrival here last night for the official programme today, Muhyiddin, accompanied by his wife, Puan Sri Noorainee Abdul Rahman, had performed the umrah in Makkah and visited Madinah, the two holy cities.

In Makkah, Muhyiddin was granted access inside the Kaabah.

From Saudi Arabia, Muhyiddin will fly to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) today to meet the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohamed Zayed Al Nahyan, and UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed Rashid Al Maktoum, who is also the ruler of Dubai.