

PM's Saudi visit boosts ties, trade and Islamic events

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's three-day official visit to Saudi Arabia, from March 22 to 24, is being hailed as a success in strengthening international relations and trade, and bolstering Islamic activities.

Deputy director of Asia-Europe Institute, Universiti Malaya Assoc Prof Dr Roy Anthony Rogers Peter Rogers said the three aspects add value to the long-standing relationship between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, which has been established for decades.

"The visit is a continuation of the close relationship between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, since early history. Saudi Arabia was among the first countries to recognise Malaysia's independence and opened an

embassy here around 1961.

"The first prime minister, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman, was appointed as the first secretary-general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (now known as Organisation of Islamic Cooperation). This visit further strengthens the existing ties," he said on the "Apa Khabar Malaysia" programme on Bernama TV yesterday.

Rogers added that the signing of three memoranda of understanding between Malaysian and Saudi private companies during Anwar's visit opened opportunities for Malaysian companies to engage in the Middle East, thus increasing the country's investments.

Rogers also described Malaysia and Saudi

Arabia as having a special relationship under the umbrella of Islam, especially involving the - management of *haj* and *umrah* pilgrimages, which requires the cooperation of both countries.

"There are two holy Muslim cities located in Saudi Arabia, Mecca and Medina. That is why Saudi Arabia was the first non-Asean country to be officially visited by Anwar since he assumed office.

"We also hope that with this visit, the quota for the *haj* pilgrimage will be increased and cost reduced, so that Muslims in Malaysia can have the opportunity to perform the *haj* despite the cost of managing the pilgrimage is currently increasing," he added. - Bernama