

Ahmad Zahid Begins Two-day Visit to Sri Lanka Thursday

Bernama

July 20, 2016

From R. Ravichandran

COLOMBO, July 20 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi begins a two-day working visit to Sri Lanka Thursday with a tight schedule that includes a courtesy call on President Maithripala Sirisena.

Malaysian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Wan Zaidi Wan Abdullah, speaking to Malaysian journalists at the Malaysian Embassy here today, said Ahmad Zahid's visit was aimed at enhancing bilateral relations in various fields between Kuala Lumpur and Colombo.

He said Ahmad Zahid, who is also Home Minister, was scheduled to arrive here at 12.30am Thursday (about 3am Malaysian time), accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Hamidah Khamis, and would hold a meeting with Sri Lanka's Minister of Home Affairs Vajira Abeywardena at the ministry in Independence Avenue Thursday morning.

Ahmad Zahid is also scheduled to hold talks with Minister of Foreign Employment Thalatha Atukorale at the ministry at the Asser Arcade Building, also on Thursday.

"Malaysia and Sri Lanka have had close bilateral relations since diplomatic ties were established in 1957. Although this is a working visit, the government of Sri Lanka has classified it as an official visit," said Wan Zaidi.

Wan Zaidi said that besides paying a courtesy call on President Maithripala Thursday, the deputy prime minister was also scheduled to make a courtesy call on Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on Friday at his office at Temple Tree here.

Ahmad Zahid is also scheduled to hold talks with Sri Lanka's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mangala Samaraweera, also on Friday.

Wan Zaidi said that among the issues expected to be discussed by the deputy prime minister during the visit was cooperation of the two countries in combating terrorism.

"Malaysia is very committed to international peace and regional security, hence relations, including with Sri Lanka, are very vital in ensuring that these issues are addressed together, either bilaterally or multilaterally," he said.

Replying to a question, Wan Zaidi said matters relating to recruitment of workers from Sri Lanka might also be discussed in view of requests from the Sri Lankan government to increase the number of Sri Lankan workers in the plantation and manufacturing sectors in Malaysia.

"Sri Lanka has not become a major supplier of foreign workers for the Malaysian market but there is a demand for certain sectors," he said.

Wan Zaidi said the deputy prime minister would also officiate at the ground--breaking ceremony of Hyrax Oil Sdn Bhd lubricants manufacturing plant in Muthurajawela, about 25 minutes from the Colombo city centre, on Thursday.

The ceremony would also be attended by Sri Lanka's Minister of Petroleum Resources Development Chandima Weerakkody.

He said the project was a joint venture between the Malaysian company and Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC).

Wan Zaidi said Ahmad Zahid would also meet a group calling themselves the Malaysian Diaspora in Sri Lanka and Friends of Malaysia as well as other Malaysians working and living in Sri Lanka at a dinner function here on Thursday.

Wan Zaidi said there were currently about 100 Malaysians working and staying in this South Asian country.

During the visit, Ahmad Zahid is also scheduled to visit the Asia Pacific Institute for Information Technology (APIIT) here on Friday besides meeting with the Sri Lanka branch of the Malay World Islamic World (DMDI) group also on Friday, before flying home at 2pm (4.30pm in Malaysia).

The DMDI event involves a meeting with Sri Lankan Malay representatives.

"During the visit to APIIT, Ahmad Zahid will look at the involvement of Malaysian educational institutions here," said Wan Zaidi.

He said there were currently about 1,500 Sri Lankan students in Malaysia, while there were no Malaysian students in Sri Lanka.

In terms of tourism, about 51,000 Sri Lankan citizens visited Malaysia in 2015 and the figure is expected to go up this year by eight to 10 per cent.

Sri Lanka is Malaysia's 46th biggest trading partner and Malaysia's 38th biggest export destination. Malaysia's investment in Sri Lanka has touched more than US\$2 billion to date.

-- BERNAMA

Copyright © 2016 BERNAMA

<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v8/newsindex.php?id=1264907>