

Economic, security issues high on agenda of Mahathir's visit to Thailand

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BANGKOK, Oct 23 (Bernama) – Issues relating to the economy, security and ASEAN will be high on the agenda of Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his two-day official visit to Thailand beginning tomorrow.

According to the Malaysian Ambassador to Thailand, Datuk Jojie Samuel, Mahathir's visit, his first to Thailand since becoming Malaysia's seventh prime minister in May, will reaffirm the excellent diplomatic ties between the two countries established 61 years ago.

"The focus of the Prime Minister's visit will be on issues of common interest in economy, security and ASEAN, which portray the excellent and strategic ties between the two neighbouring countries," he told the Malaysian media covering the upcoming visit, here Tuesday.

Economic issues will receive significant attention during the visit due to the fact that trade between the two countries has been on the upswing in recent years, he said.

Last year, said Jojie, the value of bilateral trade between Malaysia and Thailand amounted to RM98.69 billion, which was an increase of 18.43 per cent from the RM86.46 billion registered in 2016.

During the period under review, Malaysia exported RM50.53 billion of goods to Thailand and imported RM48.16 billion from that country, making the balance of trade in favour of Kuala Lumpur.

"Thailand is Malaysia's fifth largest trading partner globally and the second largest within ASEAN," he said, adding that trade between the two countries from January until August

this year increased 17.9 per cent to RM75.59 billion.

He said more than 1,000 Malaysian companies have set up operations in Thailand with an investment of about RM9.5 billion up until 2017, compared to RM683 million Thai investments in Malaysia up until the same year.

Despite the excellent economic ties, more can be done to boost trade, especially trade in border areas which contributed to about 70 per cent of the total trade between the two countries, said Jojie.

Both leaders, he said, will also discuss other topics of mutual interest, including tourism, smuggling in the border areas, cross-border crime and Thailand's chairmanship of ASEAN next year.

As a statesman in the regional grouping, Dr Mahathir, according to the ambassador, is also expected to discuss with his counterpart on Thailand assuming the ASEAN chairmanship next year and other regional as well as international issues.

The Prime Minister, who will be accompanied by his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali during the trip, has made five official visits to Thailand during his past tenure as Malaysia's fourth prime minister, with the last one in 2003 when he attended the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Bangkok.

Dr Mahathir was Malaysia's prime minister from 1981 to 2003.

The Prime Minister, said Jojie, will have a busy schedule during his two-day stay in Bangkok, beginning with an official welcoming ceremony at the Government House followed by a restricted and bilateral meeting with his counterpart Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha at the same venue. Both leaders will have a joint press conference after the bilateral meeting.

On Thursday, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to receive a courtesy call from Tan Sri Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi, the chairman of one of Thailand's leading conglomerates, TCC Group, and hold a meeting with the Malaysia-Thailand Chamber of Commerce.

Dr Mahathir is also expected to meet his longtime friend, Gen Prem Tinsulanonda, who was Thailand's prime minister from 1980 to 1988, at the latter's residence in Si Sao Thewes, Bangkok.

The 98-year-old Prem is also the president of the Privy Council, an influential body of advisors to Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn.

In the afternoon, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to have lunch with the Malaysian diaspora before departing for the country's premier institution of higher learning, the Chulalongkorn University, to attend a function.

Dr Mahathir will deliver a talk on 'Malaysia-Thailand Bilateral Relations in the Context of ASEAN' before ending his visit to Thailand.

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