

MAHATHIR  
BY G. PALANIVEL

KUALALUMPUR, SEPT. 19 (BERNAMA) --DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD'S OFFICIAL VISIT TO ITALY BEGINNING SEPT.24 -- THE FIRST BY A MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER -- IS EXPECTED BY ITALIAN OFFICIALS AND INDUSTRIALISTS HERE TO BE A TURNING POINT IN THE HITHERTO LOW-KEYED ITALIAN-MALAYSIAN ECONOMIC AND TRADE RELATIONS.

MALAYSIAN OFFICIALS ARE ALSO OPTIMISTIC THAT THE VISIT, WILL BRING ABOUT A NEW TREND IN BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

THE HIGH POINT OF THE VISIT IS THE EXPLORATION OF ECONOMIC AND TRADE OPPORTUNITIES AS INDICATED BY DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR'S ITINERARY AND HIS DELEGATION, WHICH INCLUDES 27 MEMBERS FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

HIS OFFICIAL PROGRAMME INCLUDES A CALL ON PRESIDENT SANDRO PERTINI ON THE FIRST DAY OF HIS VISIT, WHICH COINCIDENTALLY, IS THE EVE OF THE PRESIDENT'S 88TH BIRTHDAY.

THIS WILL BE FOLLOWED: BY A +FOUR-EYED+ MEETING BETWEEN DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR AND ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER BETTINO CRAXI.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR IS EXPECTED TO BRIEF HIS ITALIAN COUNTERPART ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND KAMPUCHEA.

ITALY SUPPORTS THE ASEAN STAND ON KAMPUCHEA.

THE TALKS BETWEEN THE TWO PRIME MINISTERS ARE ALSO EXPECTED TO TOUCH ON ECONOMIC COOPERATION. -- MORE

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE HAD A PERSONAL HAND IN PROGRAMMING HIS VISITS AND MANY OF THEM HAVE BEEN INCLUDED AT HIS REQUEST.

THESE INCLUDE STUDY TOURS OF ROBOTISED CHAINS AND TESTING GROUNDS OF LEADING ITALIAN AUTOMOBILE PLANTS, COMPUTERISATION SYSTEMS, TELECOMMUNICATIONS, AERONAUTICAL AND SHIPYARD CENTRES IN TORINO AND PISA.

THE PRIME MINISTER IS ALSO SCHEDULED TO MEET ABOUT 350 MALAYSIANS WHO ARE WORKING ON A MALAYSIAN NAVAL PROJECT AT THE INTERMARINE SHIPYARD IN PISA ON THE FINAL DAY OF HIS VISIT.

HE WILL ALSO ADDRESS A JOINT MEETING OF THE ITALIAN AND MALAYSIAN PRIVATE SECTORS.

HERE THE PRIME MINISTER IS EXPECTED TO OUTLINE MALAYSIA'S INTERESTS AND OBJECTIVES.

'DISCUSSIONS WILL ALSO BE HELD ON THE PROMOTION OF DIRECT TRADE, INVESTMENTS, JOINT-VENTURE PROJECTS, TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER.--MORE

MAHATHIR 3 KUALA LUMPUR-

BOTH SIDES ARE ALSO HOPEFUL OF SOME FINAL AGREEMENT OR PERHAPS EVEN THE SIGNING OF AN AGREEMENT ON THE ITALIAN OFFER OF A SECOND LINE OF CREDIT FOR US200 MILLION (ABOUT MB468 MILLION).

THE FIRST LINE OF CREDIT FOR US9100 MILLION WAS SIGNED IN 1981.

ITALIAN TRADE SOURCES HERE ARE OVERWELMINGLY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE VISIT AND ARE HOPEFUL THAT SOME AGREEMENT WOULD BE REACHED ON THE LAUNCHING OF TWO TRADING COMPANIES, ONE HERE AND THE OTHER IN ITALY, TO PROMOTE TRADE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AND IN THIRD COUNTRIES.

THE SOURCES SAID THAT THE MALAYSIAN OVERSEAS INVESTMENT CORPORATION WHOSE REPRESENTATIVES WOULD BE IN THE DELEGATION WERE KEEN ON THE IDEA.

THE IDEA HAD BEEN DISCUSSED EARLIER THIS YEAR WHEN THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE ITALIAN-MALAYSIAN JOINT COMMISSION ON TRADE AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION WAS HELD HERE.--MORE

THE FIRST SECRETARY OF THE ITALIAN EMBASSY HERE, ENCIK PIO MARIANI, SAID ITALIANS HAD PLACED HIGH HOPES ON THIS VISIT.

THE AMBASSADOR, ENCIK MARCELLO SPATAFORA, HAD ALREADY GONE BACK TO ITALY THREE WEEKS AHEAD TO COORDINATE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE VISIT.

ENCIK MARIANI AND THE ITALIAN TRADE COMMISSIONER HERE, DR. SERGIO GIARDINA, SAID THE EMBASSY AND THE ITALIAN TRADE OFFICE HAD BEEN PLAGUED WITH ENQUIRIES FROM ITALY ABOUT THE VISIT.

+ITALIANS ARE SO ENTHUSIASTIC THAT THEY WANT THE PRIME MINISTER TO SEE HALF OF ITALY,+ ADDED ENCIK MARIANI.

HE SAID THE ITALIANS, WHO HAD ALL THE WHILE BEEN DEALING WITH ONLY TRADITIONAL PARTNERS IN EUROPE, SOUTH AMERICA AND WEST ASIA, HAD CHANGED THEIR ATTITUDE AND WERE NOW FOCUSING THEIR INTEREST IN MALAYSIA WHICH HAD A POTENTIAL FOR A SEVEN TO EIGHT PERCENT GROWTH, COMPARED TO ITALY'S TRADITIONAL PARTNERS WHERE GROWTH WAS ONLY ABOUT ONE PER CENT ANNUALLY.--MORE

DR. GIARDINA SAID THAT IN THE PAST THE ITALIAN PRIVATE SECTOR HAD NOT FOCUSED ITS INTEREST IN MALAYSIA.

THIS WAS EVIDENT FROM THE LOW VOLUME OF TRADE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

ITALIAN EXPORTS TO MALAYSIA AMOUNTED TO ABOUT \$270 MILLION LAST YEAR AND ITS IMPORTS FROM MALAYSIA TOTALLED ABOUT \$290.

ITALY HAS ALSO SET UP SOME JOINT-VENTURES HERE.

DR. GIARDINA SAID THE ITALIAN INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN TRADE HAD, UNDER A PROGRAMME KNOWN AS +PROJECT MALAYSIA+, IDENTIFIED MALAYSIA AS A POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY STABLE COUNTRY FOR ITALIAN PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR FIVE YEARS AND MORE.

WITH THIS, DR. GIARDINA SAID, **ITALY WHICH RANKED AS THE WORLD'S SEVENTH INDUSTRIALISED NATION**, WAS EXPECTED TO MAKE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO IMPROVE TRADE AND ECONOMIC TIES WITH MALAYSIA.

DR. GIARDINA ALSO SAID THAT THE ITALIANS WERE NOT MERELY LOOKING FOR MARKETS TO **SELL THEIR** GOODS BUT WERE ALSO KEEN IN TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER.--MORE

OTHER TRADE SOURCES SAID ITALY WHICH HAD SUFFERED LOSSES DUE TO CHANGING POLITICAL SITUATIONS IN SOUTH AMERICA AND WEST ASIA, WHERE IT HAD BEEN TRADITIONALLY CONCENTRATING, WAS NOW SERIOUSLY DIVERSIFYING TO OTHER COUNTRIES.

ITALY, WHICH DOES NOT HAVE ANY MAJOR PRIMARY RESOURCES, IS ALSO KEEN TO CULTIVATE DIRECT CONTACT WITH COUNTRIES LIKE MALAYSIA WHERE AN ABUNDANCE OF RAW MATERIALS ARE FOUND.

THIS IS INDICATED IN ITS PROPOSALS TO SET UP RESOURCE-BASED JOINT-VENTURE INDUSTRIES IN MALAYSIA.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR'S THREE-DAY VISIT IS A TIGHTLY-PACKED ONE.

MALAYSIAN OFFICIALS SAY THAT THE PRIME MINISTER, WHO IS EXPECTED TO SPEND A SHORT HOLIDAY BEFORE AND AFTER THE VISIT, MIGHT USE HIS HOLIDAY TO COMPLEMENT HIS OFFICIAL PROGRAMME.

THE PRIME MINISTER USUALLY USES HIS HOLIDAYS TO +SHOP FOR TECHNOLOGY AND IDEAS,+ THEY ADD.

A PROGRAMME HAS ALSO BEEN ARRANGED FOR DATUK SERI DATIN PADUKA DR. SITI HASMAH TO VISIT COTTAGE INDUSTRIES IN ITALY.--BERNAMA.