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KUALA LUMPUR, JUNE 26 (BERNAMA) -- THE GOVERNMENT HAS RELAXED CERTAIN RESTRICTIONS ON TRAVEL TO CHINA, DESIGNED TO FACILITATE AND IMPROVE TRADE AND ECONOMIC TIES, PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY.

BILATERAL RELATIONS IN GENERAL WOULD, HOWEVER, REMAIN ON A GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT LEVEL AND CURRENT RESTRICTIONS ON SOCIAL VISITS WOULD STILL BE IN FORCE, HE SAID.

HE TOLD THIS TO NEWSMEN AFTER PRESENTING CHEQUES FOR THE AFRICAN FAMINE RELIEF FUND ON BEHALF OF THE MALAYSIAN RED CRESCENT SOCIETY TO THE LEAGUE OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT HERE.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR CONFIRMED THAT THE CABINET HAD ON JUNE 6 DISCUSSED A PAPER ON RELATIONS WITH CHINA AND THAT THE CABINET HAD AGREED TO THE RELAXATIONS IN AN EFFORT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CHINA'S MODERNISATION PROGRAMMES.

OFFICIALS, MEANWHILE, SAID THE RELAXATION CAME IN THE FORM OF A NEW CATEGORY OF VISITORS TO CHINA -- ECONOMICALLY BENEFICIAL VISITS.
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UNDER THIS CATEGORY, THE AGE RESTRICTION OF ABOVE 30 IS REMOVED FOR +BONA FIDE+ BUSINESSMEN.

PRESENTLY, THOSE BELOW 30 ARE NOT ALLOWED TO TRAVEL TO CHINA FOR WHATEVER PURPOSES.

HOWEVER, SUCH BUSINESSMEN WOULD STILL HAVE TO GIVE TWO WEEKS NOTICE BEFORE MAKING THE VISITS TO THE RELEVANT MINISTRIES.

THE CABINET PAPER CONSISTING OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE, SET UP LAST YEAR TO DEAL WITH THE GENERAL QUESTION OF HOW TO INCREASE MALAYSIA-CHINA TRADE WITHOUT JEOPARDISING MALAYSIA'S SECURITY AND NATIONAL UNITY, WAS PRESENTED BY FOREIGN MINISTER TENGKU AHMAD RITHAUDDEEN

THE COMMITTEE, CHAIRED BY DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER ENCIK ABDUL KADIR SHEIKH FADZIR, WAS SET UP FOLLOWING A SPECIAL CABINET MEETING LAST YEAR AT WHICH THE THEN FOREIGN MINISTER, TAN SRI GHAZALI SHAFIE, BRIEFED HIS MINISTERIAL COLLEAGUES ON HIS VISIT TO CHINA.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID ALL MALAYSIAN COMPANIES, INCLUDING BUMIPUTERA CONCERNS, WERE ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN DIRECT TRADE WITH CHINA. -- BERNAMA

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