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Mahathir-Czech

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KUALA LUMPUR, May 17 (Bernama) -- The visa requirement for Malaysians making social visits to the Czech and Slovak Republic has been lifted with the signing of a partial visa abolition agreement between the two countries here today.

Prime Minister ~~Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad~~ and his Czech and Slovak counterpart, Dr Marian Calfa, witnessed the signing after leading their respective sides for bilateral talks at the Prime Minister's Office here.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and the Czech and Slovak Deputy Foreign Minister Martin Palous signed the +Partial Visa Abolition Agreement+.

Briefing reporters later, Foreign Ministry Deputy Secretary General (1), Datuk Abdul Halim Ali, said the agreement would lead to more exchanges of visits and economic cooperation between the peoples of the two countries.

+Prior to this, all Malaysians going to Czechoslovakia required a visa,+ he said. Under the agreement, Malaysians going the republic for social visits of up to three months no longer need a visa. -- more

♥17/05/19-32MST

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Datuk Abdul Halim explained that the agreement was +partial+ because a total abolition agreement would allow a person to visit the country for any length of time without a visa and to seek employment without a permit.

He said the two governments were working on agreements on the avoidance of double taxation and investment guarantee which they hoped to sign soon.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir and Dr Calfa earlier met for 30 minutes and exchanged views on various issues including ways to improve bilateral ties.

Dr Calfa outlined several areas for possible Malaysian investment in the republic like steel, engineering products, farm machinery and power generation, Datuk Abdul Halim said.

The country was interested to buy petroleum and to continue importing natural rubber from Malaysia which was presently supplying 40 per cent of their requirement, he added. -- more

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The volume of trade between the two countries for last year totalled about \$70 million with Malaysia exporting goods worth \$49.5 million, mainly crude natural rubber.

Dr Calfa told Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir that the republic was seeking to join the European Community and it expected to sign an agreement for associate status soon, Datuk Abdul Halim said.

He added: +Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir recognised the reason for them wanting to join the EC but he expressed hope that the country would use its influence to ensure that the EC would not be protectionist.

+Dr Calfa agreed that protectionism will not bring about long-term benefits.+ -- more

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At a press conference afterwards, Dr Calfa elaborated on the Czech and Slovak offer to promote trade ties.

He said his country offered technology to build mini-hydro power plants and he noted that Malaysia showed positive reaction to it.

His country was also willing to participate in turnkey projects and supply construction material and transportation technology to Malaysia, he added.

Dr Calfa said his country wished to sell light aircraft, trucks, buses and ships and it was considering importing Malaysian crude oil and electrical goods.

Dr Calfa, who was earlier granted an audience by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Azlan Shah, said his Majesty accepted an invitation extended by Czech and Slovak President Vaclav Havel to visit the country. -- Bernama

♥17/05/20-28MST