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Mahathir-stop-over

DR M INSPECTS MASSCORP'S DANANG EPZ

By: Rachman Nordin

DANANG, March 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today inspected the Massda EPZ at An Don near here -- the second export processing zone in Vietnam being developed by Malaysian interests -- during a two-hour stop-over.

In a brief and unscheduled speech in response to welcoming remarks by Tan Sri Azman Hashim, chairman of the Malaysia South-South Corporation (Masscorp), developer of the EPZ, Dr Mahathir reiterated his call that Malaysians invest in Vietnam.

"I am sure such encouragement is acceptable to the Vietnamese government and for this reason they give their cooperation to impending investors," he said.

He attributed the progress of the Danang EPZ to the various efforts by many people and authorities to attract investment and development to Vietnam.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Culture and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik as well as an entourage of deputy ministers and business leaders, was on the last day of a three-day working visit to the country.

When he unveiled a commemorative plaque for the Massda EPZ, Dr Mahathir also made local history by being the first foreign prime minister to set foot on Vietnam's central coastal and third largest city in two decades.

Azman said what the prime minister saw today at the EPZ was the result of efforts mooted by both Dr Mahathir and his Vietnamese counterpart Vo Van Kiet when Dr Mahathir first visited the country four years ago.

The Danang EPZ, launched in March 1994, now offers 68 hectares of industrial sites and according to Azman, there was encouraging response from investors including those from Hong Kong and South Korea.

While at the EPZ, Dr Mahathir, together with the Chairman of the Quangnam-Danang People's Committee Truong Quang Duoc, witnessed the signing of a land lease agreement and a memorandum of understanding for two Malaysia-Vietnam joint ventures.

The land-lease agreement involved timber furniture-maker Pohmay Craft Sdn Bhd and Massda EPZ while the tri-partite MOU was between Gamuda Berhad, the local Hai Van Cement Company and Masscorp.

Pohmay Craft, investing US\$890,000 (RM2.2 million) in a Vietnamese joint venture called Royal Crafts, will lease 25,000 sq metres in the EPZ for its factory to produce in-door and out-door furniture and employ 200 local workers.

Under the MOU, Gamuda will hold a 60 per cent stake, Masscorp (10 per cent) and Hai Van (30 per cent) in a proposed cement plant estimated to cost US\$240 million (RM600 million).

The proposed factory, with a production capacity of 1.4 million tonnes per year, will be sited in Thanh My, 70km west from here, and will provide jobs to up to 600 Vietnamese in the initial stage.

Dr Mahathir later visited the EPZ's first joint-venture factory making decorative candles owned by Sungai Petani-based Sinaran Manufacturing Bhd.

He was also taken on a brief tour of Danang's My Khe beach, made famous by the "China Beach" television series, before continuing the last leg of his working visit to Ho Chi Minh City, an hour's flight from here. --

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