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Vietnam-Mahathir

VIETNAM EAGERLY AWAITS DR MAHATHIR'S VISIT

By: Michael Raj

BANGKOK, March 2 (Bernama) -- Vietnam is eagerly awaiting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit next week, hoping it will propel ties between the two countries to a significantly higher plane.

Nguyen Trung, Assistant to Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet, told Bernama here that Dr Mahathir's visit, his second since 1992, would further reinforce the excellent bond between Kuala Lumpur and Hanoi.

"What we desire for is greater linkages be it in the social, political or economic fields," he said when met on the second day of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) here.

Trung, a member of the Vietnamese delegation to ASEM, said that since his country's official admission to Asean at the Asean Ministerial Meeting in Brunei last year, Kiet was keen to touch base with all the Asean heads.

Asked about Malaysian investments in Vietnam, Trung said Kiet was happy with the many investors who have invested in the country which, in the process, has greatly aided the country's economic reconstruction.

He said there were numerous foreign investors competing for investments in Vietnam, which was why it was imperative that Malaysian investors be more aggressive so as not to be left out of opportunities there.

Vietnam, he added, needed greater investments to accelerate implementation of a market economy.

This would position the country well in adhering to the Asean Free Trade Area (AFTA), where Vietnam, given that its economy was still lagging behind those of other Asean countries, have been a given a grace period to catch up with the rest.

The other Asean countries have committed themselves to market opening measures, including tariff reduction, leading to the creation of a single market by the year 2008.

On whether any agreements were expected to be signed between Malaysia and Vietnam during Dr Mahathir's visit, Trung said no official agreements would be signed but Dr Mahathir would witness several private sector pacts being clinched. -- BERNAMA

MR LDB