

27/03/1997

German President's visit to boost ties

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GERMAN President Dr Roman Herzog will make his first official visit to Malaysia beginning Tuesday aimed at enhancing bilateral relations between the two countries.

German Ambassador to Malaysia Mr Harald-Norbert Nestroy said the five-day state visit forms part of Herzog's two-nation Asian tour. The President is scheduled to spend three days in Kuala Lumpur, and then visit Kuching, Sarawak before leaving for Japan on April 5.

"Herzog's entourage will include his wife, Christiane Herzog, and a 100-member delegation comprising government officials and journalists," he told a news conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Herzog will also make a courtesy call on the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Jaafar and Raja Permaisuri Agong at Istana Negara soon after his arrival. He is also scheduled to meet Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad the following day.

During his visit, Herzog will visit the Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia (Porim), the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque in Shah Alam, the KL Tower and the National Museum of History Dataran Merdeka.

Herzog will also attend a special training session by the Malaysian National Youth Teams where he will be accompanied by Franz Beckenbauer, president of the Football Club Bayern Munich of Germany.

Asked why the President should want to visit Porim, Nestroy said: "The visit is important since Malaysia is the largest producer and exporter of palm oil and palm oil is one of the few commodities which are extremely thriving and important in the Malaysian business.

"In addition, the President will have the opportunity to visit this very modern institute (Porim) and get a good illustration of what it does with, not only the palm oil but other parts of the oil palm tree as well," he said.

Herzog is also scheduled to open an inter-cultural dialogue session at the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (Ikim) on the third day.

"Islam in the world has suffered from many distortions or misconceptions through terrorists who originated from some countries in West Asia, but we have seen that Malaysia has demonstrated itself as a strict yet tolerant Islamic country.

"This is a tribute to Malaysia, recognising its role in the Islamic world and giving the example that Islamic country can live in harmony with other cultures and races in its territory.

"That's way, by getting acquainted with this situation in Malaysia, the President wants to work and function as an interpreter when he returns to Germany.

"In Europe, we still have a lack of the real deep understanding of Islam," he said.

Germany is Malaysia's seventh largest investor. There are about 300 German companies currently in this country.

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