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MAHATHIR-EURO

MAHATHIR HOPES FOR STRONG EURO

PUTRAJAYA, April 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad hopes a strong Euro currency in future would contribute to the reform of the international monetary system, European Union (EU) Ambassador Michel Caillouet said here today.

Caillouet said the premier was very positive about the future of Euro and its contribution towards the stability of the monetary system.

"Euro is now a reality and the Prime Minister recognises the important role it could play in the reforms he has been pushing for," he told reporters after calling on Dr Mahathir at his office here today.

Caillouet, who is based in Bangkok and oversees EU matters in Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand, will be ending his four-year-stint soon.

He said Euro had a big potential as the EU represented 20 percent of the world trade and its fundamentals were very strong, adding that they were projecting a four percent growth next year.

"From Jan 1, 2002, national currencies will disappear. The Prime Minister is happy with the birth of Euro and hopes to see a strong Euro one day," he said.

Caillouet said they also discussed ways to strengthen ties between Malaysia and the EU, especially trades and exchange of academic programmes.

He said Malaysia had a trade surplus of five billion Euro last year and chalked up an increase of 20 percent in export to EU, adding that they discussed measures to strengthen market access.

On the annual Asean-EU ministerial meeting which has been frozen since 1997 due to the latter's refusal to engage Myanmar, Caillouet said there was a possibility that it would resume this year.

"We have not changed our policy towards Myanmar but it's important to push for more activities between EU and Asean. The relations are very important because there is great potential in Asean," he added.

An EU-Asean senior officials meeting is expected to be held in Portugal in June. -- BERNAMA

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