

03/10/2001

(The Day of German ... )

THE Day of German Unity is a day of joy for all Germans and a moment of thankfulness to all those who facilitated the reunification in 1990.

Together with Malaysians, the Germans in this country have been commemorating that Day, which has become the symbol of peace and freedom in Europe and of the end of the Cold War.

This year, however, the Day is overshadowed by images and emotions of the Sept 11 terrorist acts on the US.

As the Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said, our statements of political and moral solidarity with the US are, now, more than just a matter of course.

I had hoped to be able to relate some observations from the visit Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had been planning to undertake to Germany.

I much respect, however, his decision to delay the visit for some months.

Not only do the people in both our countries feel that their attention is focused on how to combat terrorism on a global scale but they also feel the need for guidance by leading politicians in such a tense situation.

Schroeder made it clear that those behind the attacks have not succeeded in creating a global divide; there is no clash of civilisations but rather a sense of unity around the globe.

Looking back, Germans have enjoyed living here for many decades and appreciate the richness and variety of the cultures here.

Germany is the largest trading partner within the European Union; more than 300 companies give testimony of that close and fruitful cooperation.

I trust that with Malaysia's ambitious Vision 2020, there is more scope for greater closeness.

This holds true not only for economic but also for cultural ties, especially in higher education.

In this respect, I welcome the growing number of professional studies and university partnerships between our countries.

The German Malaysian Institute stands as an impressive example of enhancing such ties in many ways.

I am pleased that the number of Malaysian students in Germany has been steadily increasing over the past years, facilitated by more than 200 degree courses in the English language.

Also, more and more Malaysians are studying German at the Goethe Institute, thereby gaining linguistic and cultural competence that can enhance their careers.

The institute promotes and organises cultural events, such as art exhibitions, films, and concerts of modern and classical music.

The German cultural presence in Malaysia also comprises sports, be it cycling, hockey or football, where German teams are never missing and cooperation in training is flourishing.

Today is a special day for me since with the newly-refurbished German Residence in Kuala Lumpur will be inaugurated, displaying also the activities of German institutions and companies here.

This building, which was built in the early 1960s, has a long tradition as a forum for German-Malaysian cooperation and people-to-people activities.

I have decided to revive that tradition and I look forward to hosting

many functions and meetings in the residence to cement the close ties between our countries.

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