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Mahathir-Europe  
WHITEHALL HOPES TO STRENGTHEN TIES WITH PUTRAJAYA

By: Alan Ting

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 6 (Bernama) -- Whitehall is confident that its ties with Putrajaya will be further strengthened with the visit by the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, to Britain next week.

Outgoing British High Commissioner to Malaysia, Graham Fry, said Britain was very keen to ensure "a continuous, close and friendly relations with Malaysia since both countries had deep links ranging from history to investment, trade and education."

"During the coming meeting between Dr Mahathir and Tony Blair (British Prime Minister), I would expect them to talk on the general state of bilateral relations and perhaps one or two other international issues as well," he told Bernama in an interview here today.

Fry, whose three-year term ends on Sept 19, will return to London as the Deputy Under Secretary in the Foreign Affairs office.

Dr Mahathir will arrive in London on Sept 11 for a two-day visit before going on to Russia, Germany and Luxemburg.

Fry said Britain had always regarded Malaysia as an important country in this part of the world.

"So what we are aiming to do is to deepen those links and make sure we keep the relations close," he said.

"It is also important for Britain to develop that relations.

He said among efforts that Britain would make was to have more trade and investment in Malaysia which had already recovered from the gloomy condition in 1997.

"The British Government has decided to explain to the small and medium (SMI) companies through the trade partners in UK about the Malaysian economic recovery," he said.

Fry said there would be more British trade missions to Malaysia before the end of this year.

"There will be a Malaysia British Council mission at the end of October and in November more than 100 British companies will visit Malaysia in the oil and gas mission," he said.

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Fry said both countries were also expected to build up science and technology co-operation.

It would be noted that Britain had produced the most number of science nobel prize winners after the USA, he said.

"We want closer relationship in science and technology since we have at least 15 British companies operating in the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC)," he said.

The MSC is a high technology zone covering 15 by 50KM south of Kuala Lumpur.

On education, Fry said Britain had expanded its scholarship programme for Malaysia and had offered about 50 postgraduate scholarships for Malaysians to further their studies in Britain.

"Everything will be paid for under this scholarship programme as we are very keen to have the best for Malaysia," he said.

Fry said the British Embassy in Malaysia was also working towards setting up a "British Alumni Network" since thousands of Malaysians graduated from British universities every year.

On his new posting, he said "I am still very much involved with Malaysia since my new job will include Malaysia although the coverage will be wider."

"I am extremely happy with Malaysia and feel very sorry to leave," he said.

Asked when Blair would make his first visit to Malaysia, Fry said, "I know he (Blair) likes to come, it is just a matter of time."

Blair is serving his second term as Prime Minister having led his Labour Party to victory in the British election in June this year.

-- BERNAMA

AT AHH AAM