

Dr M keeps gruelling pace

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From Ramlan Said in Berlin

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WOING investors is not an easy job as can be seen by the gruelling pace kept up by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the business delegation during their three-day visit to Germany.

"This trip is *no makan angin*," declared Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, who together with Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Leo Moggie, accompanied Dr Mahathir in meeting scores of German top businessmen and opinion leaders.

Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo and Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Mohd Ali

Rustam are also part of the delegation. For three solid days, from the Bavarian capital of Munich to the beautiful and modern city of Berlin. Rafidah said the Germans were bombarded with nothing else but Malaysia.

"The programme is tight but slotting everything in a short period is a better approach as we are able to keep the momentum, reminding them all the time about the benefits of doing business in Malaysia."

The best news coming out from Berlin is perhaps Dr Mahathir's announcement that German automaker and distributor BMW has chosen Malaysia as the regional centre for its operations in Asia.

The company is expected to operate from Cyberjaya and the Tanjung Pelepas Port in Johor.

What made it even more exciting is the fact that Rolls-Royce cars are now manufactured by BMW. Soon after touching down at Munich Airport on Monday, Dr Mahathir went straight to work, addressing some 230 top company executives and business leaders at the Malaysian-German Business Forum.

There he delivered a message which all investors would like to hear that their investments would be safe, there would be consistency and stability and investors need not worry of any sudden changes in policies.

The assurance is indeed vital as awareness about Malaysia and issues concerning the country were still low in Germany, even among its policy makers and opinion leaders.

in bid to sell Malaysia

Emerging from a meeting with a group of German opinion leaders from the *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* or the Foundation for Science and Politics, Rafidah said she was quite surprised by the lack of knowledge about Malaysia among some of them.

She attributed this to the Germans being too "eurocentric" and that only now they are expanding their scope to countries in East Asia like Malaysia.

Rafidah said the Government would try to enlist the help of German companies operating in Malaysia there are 300 of them with German interests in the manufacturing and non-manufacturing sector to disseminate more information about Malaysia in Germany.

With companies now shifting

their attention to China as the country to place their money, German investors have to be courted with the correct information. In Berlin, Dr Mahathir met with leaders and members of the influential *Bunderverband der Deutschen Industrie* or Confederation of German Industries and *Ostasiatischer Verein* or the German-Asia Pacific Business Association.

Briefing the audience on investment and business opportunities in Malaysia, he said German firms would be most welcome to invest in the automotive sector in Malaysia.

On the political side, Dr Mahathir had fruitful talks with a number of German leaders, mainly Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

Dr Mahathir also met in Munich

the President of Bavaria, Dr Edmund Stoiber. The man touted to succeed Schroeder as chancellor in the November election, and President of the German Bundestag, Wolfgang Thierse.

The Prime Minister said one of the benefits of his visit was that it provided Malaysia the chance to state its stand on various issues, like terrorism.

Dr Mahathir said he explained to Schroeder the need to address the roots of terrorism and how wrong it was to label all Muslims as terrorists. With events on Sept 11 still fresh in everybody's mind, he said the Germans were eager to know Malaysia's perception and analysis on Islam, Afghanistan, Palestine and Indonesia.