

Mahathir *arrives* **for** *three-day* **Swiss** *visit*

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By SA'ODAH ELIAS

ZURICH: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, arrived here yesterday for a three-day official visit to Switzerland to enhance bilateral and economic ties.

Dr Mahathir is expected to meet the President of the Swiss Confederation, Kasper Villinger, in Berne on the second day of his visit.

According to a senior Foreign Ministry official, among the topics expected to be raised between the two leaders were terrorism, globalisation, new financial architecture and developments in East Asia.

Another issue that may be discussed is Switzerland's co-operation with the Anti-Corruption Agency's investigations into certain individuals, believed to have stashed away ill-gotten wealth in some banks here.

"Dr Mahathir may thank the Swiss authorities for their co-operation thus far. As far as we know, they have always been very co-operative.

"The difficulties in dealing with banks here are not experienced by Malaysia alone but by all other governments, including those of the United States and Britain," the official told Malaysian journalists here.

He said Dr Mahathir's visit to Switzerland was very significant considering the country's neutrality and its eventual inclusion into the United Nations.

Dr Mahathir is also scheduled to visit the Sauber Petronas Engineering AG plant in Hinwil near Berne, where Petronas chairman Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin will brief the Prime Minister on Sauber's latest activities.

Dr Mahathir was also scheduled to hold discussions with several businessmen, including the chief operating officer of Credit Suisse Group.

"These discussions are oriented towards tapping new investment opportunities for Malaysia," he said, adding that Switzerland was Malaysia's leading trading partner outside of the European Union.

Between 1996 and 2001, he said, the Government approved a total of 40 projects with Swiss interests in Malaysia, with total investment of RM4.04bil that generated 4,313 jobs.

Malaysian delegates include International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz, Mida deputy director-general R. Karunakaran and ACA deputy director-general Datuk Mohd Zawawi Mohd Nordin.