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Mahathir-Switzerland

DR MAHATHIR ARRIVES IN SWITZERLAND FOR OFFICIAL VISIT

By: Mohd Fisol Jaafar

ZURICH, June 9 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived on a breezy, cool summer afternoon in Zurich Sunday to begin his first, three-day official visit, to Switzerland.

Like all his visits abroad, the prime minister's tour-of-duty to this skiers' mecca, which is also famous for its chocolates and luxurious timepieces, is arranged to strengthen diplomatic ties and to enhance cultural and economic relations between the two nations.

Switzerland, the host to the United Nations in Geneva and various international organisations, had played instrumental roles in international fora especially in defusing tensions at some hotspots in the world.

It is also home to a number of financial majors in the world like Credit Suisse and UBS, to name a few.

Dr Mahathir flew in from Rome where he met Pope John Paul II at the Vatican City on Friday, the first by a Malaysian prime minister, during which they discussed issues of mutual concern such as terrorism, Palestine-Israel conflict and the inter-cultural dialogue between Islam and Christianity.

From the airport, Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, were escorted to the Dolder Grand Hotel set in the pine woods of Zurich Mountain, on the west side of the Limmat River, offering a panoramic view of the city and across Lake Zurich as far as the main Alpine ridge.

Dr Mahathir started his hectic schedule in Switzerland with a meeting and reception with some 300-strong Malaysian community in Zurich in the evening, followed by a private dinner meeting with key executives of Swiss banking giant UBS AG, hosted by its chairman, Marcel Ospel.

On Monday, he will visit Sauber Petronas facility in Hinwill, about an hour drive from here.

Petronas' partnership with Sauber, a Swiss automotive engineering technology company, is not merely an image and branding exercise for the national oil corporation, but more importantly serves as an effective platform for the promotion of research and development as well as the nurturing of indigenous technology capabilities in the field of automotive engineering within Petronas.

Petronas' partnership with Red Bull Sauber Holdings in the Formula 1, for instance, has led to the formation of a joint-venture entity known as Sauber Petronas Engineering AG, which will fulfil the engineering needs of the Red Bull Sauber Petronas F1 Team, providing meaningful contributions to the team and creating added value to Petronas' sponsorship of the team.

The partnership is also aimed at enhancing Petronas' knowledge base and expertise in engines, fuel and lubricant composite technology.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, later leaves Hinwill for the Swiss capital Berne where he is scheduled to have a restricted meeting with Kaspar Villiger, President of the Swiss Federation-cum-Finance Minister.

This would be followed by a bilateral delegation meeting. Both leaders are expected to exchange views on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Dr Mahathir is expected to share his and Kuala Lumpur's views on terrorism apart from discussing matters relating to globalisation, the world financial architecture, trade and finance and banking.

Accompanying the prime minister in the talks are International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri

Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz, Finance Ministry Secretary-General Tan Sri Shamsuddin Hitam and Malaysian Ambassador to Switzerland Datuk Abdul Kadir Deen.

After the meeting, Dr Mahathir will return to Zurich to grace a Malaysian Industrial Development Authority's (MIDA) reception for the Swiss private sector where he would deliver a keynote address titled "Enhancing Malaysia-Switzerland Economic Relation."

He would later attend a private dinner hosted by Credit Suisse Chief Executive Officer Lukas Muhlemann.

The next morning, the prime minister leaves for Geneva to address the 90th Session of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conference.

He departs Geneva for neighbouring Luxembourg in the evening, ending his visit to Switzerland and to start a two-day official visit to Luxembourg, yet another European financial hub.

-- BERNAMA

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