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Dr Mahathir describes visits as `fruitful`

PETALING JAYA, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today described as "fruitful" his whirlwind tour of Russia, Germany and Poland which helped strengthen diplomatic and trade ties.

Dr Mahathir said: "They were open in our discussions with them on bilateral and international relations.

"They all agree that we need to increase trade between Malaysia and their countries."

He was speaking to reporters upon arriving at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang from Warsaw.

The Government jet carrying Dr Mahathir and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali touched down at the Subang air base this morning.

They were received by among others Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, Deputy Education Minister Datuk Aziz Samsuddin and Deputy Minister of Housing and Local Government Datuk M. Kayveas.

The Prime Minister said as a result of the visit, Malaysia may send more students to Russia.

He said Germany had agreed to help set-up higher learning institutions here.

Dr Mahathir said multinationals like Mercedes and Siemens of Germany had also expressed interest in increasing their investments in Malaysia.

The producer of BMW vehicles, Bavaria Motor Works, had already pledged to make Malaysia their centre of operations for Asia.

Touching on Poland, where Malaysia did some defence shopping with the purchase of the PT-91 battle tanks, Dr Mahathir expressed hope that Malaysian entrepreneurs would venture into businesses there.

He also spoke about the minority Muslim community in Russia and Poland. Describing them as staunch Muslims, Dr Mahathir said their faith was still very strong although they have been under communist rule for a long time.

"They want closer ties with us, especially with religious figures here," he said.

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