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Mahathir-Germany

MAHATHIR'S VISIT TO GERMANY SET TO ENERGISE KL-BERLIN TIES

By: Abdul Muin Abdul Majid

MUNICH, March 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will arrive here Monday to begin a three-day official visit to Germany with the mission of energising bilateral ties and coax more Germans to invest or visit Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali are scheduled to arrive at the Franz Josef Strauss international airport at 10am (5pm Malaysian time) to be greeted by an expected cold and foggy morning weather in this capital of the Lander or State of Bavaria in southern Germany.

The highlight of Dr Mahathir's first official visit to this country is his meeting with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder in Berlin, the prime minister's destination after Munich.

Germany, which has a population of 82.4 million people and a total area of 357,042 sq km, is the second leg of his three-nation tour which earlier took him to Russia. Dr Mahathir will proceed to Poland on Thursday.

The focus of his visit to Munich will be the Malaysian-German Business Forum where he is expected on Monday to deliver a keynote address entitled "Realising a Vision: The Malaysian Way".

According to the programme, the session will be chaired by Erdmann Vogt, president of the Malaysian-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who is also the managing director of Deutschebank Malaysia.

The event will be attended by more than 300 participants, including some 200 German captains of industry and members of the business community from both sides, who will partake in a question and answer session with the prime minister.

According to a Wisma Putra statement released earlier in Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir will take the opportunity to showcase Malaysia's attraction for investors, particularly among German small and medium enterprises, as well as remove scepticism and misinformation that potential German businessmen may have about Malaysia.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz is expected to speak on the subject of enhancing Germany-Malaysia trade and investment cooperation while Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie's presentation will touch on opportunities for collaboration in information and communication technology (ICT) in Malaysia.

Official figures show that total bilateral trade is forecast to reach Euro 6.5 billion this year (Euro 1=RM3.40), a marked improvement from 2001's preliminary total of Euro 5.98 billion.

Exports from Germany to Malaysia stood at Euro 2.5 billion in 2001 while imports to Germany from Malaysia was valued at Euro 3.45 billion.

Last year, Malaysia's main export items to Germany were semiconductors, telecommunications equipment, automatic data processing machines as well as audio visual recorders and re-producers.

It was reported that some 300 German companies are currently operating in Malaysia with investments of RM6 billion.

The choice of Munich, Germany's third largest city after Berlin and Hamburg, as the place to hold the business forum is appropriate as it is the high-tech industrial estate in Germany, an important centre of science and research as well as a city now considered as the nation's "internet capital".

On Tuesday, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to visit Siemens AG where he is scheduled to attend breakfast hosted by the company's chief executive officer Dr Heinrich von Pierer and later on be briefed about research and development activities at Siemens.

Prior to Munich, Dr Mahathir has made a private visit to Stuttgart and Dusseldorf.

Dr Mahathir will leave Munich for Berlin Tuesday afternoon and soon after his arrival there, he is scheduled to deliver a keynote address at the Asia-Pacific Committee of the German Business (APA) Economic Forum.

The address is expected to give special emphasis on business opportunities in Malaysia. Later, he is expected to open the new Malaysian embassy building at Klingelhoferstrasse 6.

Dr Mahathir's programme in Berlin will also take him on a tour designed to give him an idea of the physical development in nation's capital city.

Prior to the reunification of West and East Germany in 1990, Bonn was the capital of West Germany while East Germany's capital was East Berlin.

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