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Malaysia can learn much from Bavaria

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia had much to learn from Bavaria, which over a relatively short period of time, had been transformed from an agricultural economy to the most dynamic and modern industrial state in Germany.

The Prime Minister said it was because of this desire to learn that he had brought along a large delegation for his visit to Germany, including ministers, Chief Ministers, Menteri Besar and top corporate figures.

He made the remarks at a dinner hosted by the Minister President of Bavaria Dr Edmund Stoiber on Monday.

"I have brought with me a number of business leaders from Malaysia. I hope that in the short time that we have in Munich, there can be some interaction between them and Bavarian business leaders which could lead to business and investments in Malaysia."

Dr Mahathir is on a three-day official visit to Germany which was originally planned last year but postponed following the Sept 11 attacks on the United States.

Besides Munich, the Prime Minister will also visit Berlin for talks with Chancellor Gerhard Schroder and President of German Bundestag Wolfgang Thierse.

He said Malaysia had much to offer investors from Bavaria.

"While we are open to all value-added and hi-tech ventures, we are particularly interested in information and communication technology and multimedia."

Dr Mahathir noted that apart from world class companies such as Siemens, BMW, Infineon, Wacker and many more which were headquartered in Munich, policies of the Bavarian Government had resulted in the establishment of a host of efficiently run, innovative and profitable small and medium enterprises.

Locally known as "mittel stand", these SMEs constitute the backbone of Bavaria's prosperity.

At a separate function at the Bayerischer Hof Hotel yesterday, Dr Mahathir told a gathering of some 200 Malaysian residents and students in Munich that the Bavarians had shown that progress could be achieved if one possessed the determination.

"There are many similarities between Malaysia and Bavaria."

Like Malaysia, it was an agro-based economy 50 years ago but today, Bavaria is the richest State in Germany.

"This goes to show that if people want, they are capable of acquiring knowledge and skill to develop their country. Malaysia aspires to do the same."

However, unlike Bavaria, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had to depend on foreign investment to industrialise, an approach which proved successful.

"Because of industrialisation, there are now plenty of jobs that we have to depend on foreigners. But we need new skills and knowledge; that's why the Government is sending students overseas to learn."

The Prime Minister expressed hope that these students would not waste the opportunity given to them.

"We want students to spend their time wisely so that when they come back, they can contribute to building the country. God willing, one day Malaysia can be like Bavaria."

Dr Mahathir and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali were earlier given a

rousing welcome when they arrived at the gathering. Students and Malaysians residing in Munich and the surrounding areas jostled for a handshake and photograph with the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir quipped that he did not expect to see so many Malaysians in Munich.

"But we know you are here to work and study to gain skills and knowledge needed for the country's development."

Besides technology and skills, Dr Mahathir said Malaysians in Munich should also "acquire" Bavarian values and hospitality.

Later, Dr Mahathir witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Mara and Bavarian Ministry of Science, Research and Arts.

Mara was represented by Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Nazri Aziz while Bavaria by its Science, Technology and the Arts Minister, Hans Zehetmayer.

The MoU would pave the way for the placement of Mara-sponsored students in selected German universities.

At present, two batches of 45 students each are undergoing a two-year preparatory course at the German-Malaysia Institute in Malaysia before admission into the German universities.

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