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Mahathir-Transformation

PM INVITES GERMAN COMPANIES TO HELP TRANSFORM M'SIAN ECONOMY

By: Abdul Muin Abdul Majid

MUNICH, March 18 (Bernama) -- Barely hours after arriving in this Bavarian capital for a three-day official visit to Germany, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad handled his first task of wooing German businessmen to seek investment and economic opportunities in Malaysia.

Speaking at the Malaysian-German Business Forum here, the Prime Minister urged them to invest in Malaysia's information and communication technology (ICT) industry, saying that Germany can play a pivotal role in helping to shape the transformation of the Malaysian economy.

He said that this was based on Germany's strength as a world leader in ICT and precision engineering as well as its rich legacy of industrialisation.

Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said, was a nation with a vision, high aspirations and ambition that wanted to be a developed country by the year 2020 as envisaged by its Vision 2020.

"We believe we have much to learn from Germany and we also believe that Germany has the capability to play a significant role in our economy and in helping us out towards making our vision a reality," he said in his keynote address themed "Realising a Vision: The Malaysian Way" delivered at the forum held at the Hilton Munchen Park hotel.

Before arriving here this morning, Dr Mahathir made a private visit to Stuttgart and Dusseldorf following his trip to Russia on March 14 and 15. He will head for Poland next, the final leg of his three-nation tour.

Speaking in front of an audience of some 300 people including over 200 German businessmen, he said that they could gain a lot by investing in Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project, a 750 sq km site south of Kuala Lumpur designated as a hub for the development of multimedia products and services where everything that ICT industries need could be found.

Dr Mahathir said that German technopreneurs could leverage on MSC's flagship applications and those high technology German firms could also explore vast options including forming consortiums to develop new applications.

The flagship applications involve the electronic government, telemedicine, smart schools, multipurpose card, research and development (R&D) clusters, worldwide manufacturing web and borderless marketing centres.

He said that they could even locate their R&D activities in the MSC, use it as a regional or global marketing base and locate highly skilled German knowledge workers there to leverage on MSC's facilities in producing defining technologies and breakthroughs for the next generation.

The MSC now has 646 companies, more than the 500 targeted by the year 2003.

Dr Mahathir said that the Germans could also help Malaysia realise targets laid down in the Second Industrial Masterplan by investing in high value-added manufacturing industries and technology sectors, and at the same time facilitate the transfer of technological know-how.

The Prime Minister said foreign investors had always found Malaysia to be an attractive place in which to put their money, with the Malaysian government consistently maintaining an investment-friendly and pro-business environment.

"We are also very stable politically, and have been very consistent.

There will be no sudden changes in Malaysia," he said, noting that Malaysia's Independence did not result in the kind of nationalism that insisted on nationalising foreign holdings.

He said, instead, Malaysia invited greater foreign participation and right from the word "go", it accepted the free market system and subsequently built up world-class infrastructure as well as a business environment conducive for growth and profits.

And despite being a multi-racial and multi-religious, he said, Malaysia had maintained racial and religious harmony and avoided the kind of intolerance seen in many multi-racial countries elsewhere.

Dr Mahathir said that the lure of investing in Malaysia given its excellent prospects and potential had seen a remarkable US\$4.8 billion (RM18.24 billion) worth of foreign investments being channelled into the manufacturing sector in Malaysia last year, of which Germany was the eighth largest foreign investor in terms of approved investment.

"The figure bears testimony to Malaysia's standing as an outstanding investment hub in the region. This visit I hope will result in more German investment in Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that the total trade between Malaysia and Germany was valued at US\$4.8 billion (RM18.24 billion) last year and in fact, Germany was Malaysia's largest European Union trading partner since the year 2000.

The Prime Minister also shared with his audience Malaysia's experience in handling the devastating financial and economic crisis that swept the region in 1997.

In tackling the problem, he said, Malaysia took measures considered madness for a small developing country with little clout among the economic giants, and managed to ride out the economic turmoil very much in its unorthodox and often criticised but effective Malaysian way.

He said that as a result of what could be considered as Malaysian pragmatism, Malaysia was now back on track to realise its Vision 2020.

"Today, as we look back, we feel our efforts have been vindicated as Malaysia has emerged better off than many of its neighbours from the crisis," he added.

Apart from attending the business forum, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to meet Malaysian students and attend a dinner hosted by Minister President of the State of Bavaria, Dr Edmund Stoiber.

The Prime Minister is accompanied on his visit to Germany by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

The Malaysian delegation includes Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie, Melaka Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Ali Rustam, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamad Khir Toyo, as well as members of the Malaysian private sector.

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