

15 FEB 2002
Croatia-Visit
CROATIAN PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO BOOST BILATERAL TIES

By: R. Ravichandran

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 15 (Bernama) -- Croatian-Malaysian ties are expected to scale new heights following the visit of President Stjepan Mesic beginning Sunday.

Croatian ambassador to Malaysia Damir Perincic said that during the five-day state visit, Zagreb and Kuala Lumpur would sign an agreement on the avoidance of double taxation to facilitate further economic cooperation.

Perincic said that Croatia was keen to restart cooperation in the airline and energy sectors which were stalled several years ago following the crippling Asian economic crisis and the situation in Croatia which was just recovering from the Balkan War at that time.

"I hope and am sure that the visit will boost our (existing) cooperation in all sectors," he told Bernama in an interview at his office here today.

Perincic also said that Zagreb was keen to explore cooperation in new areas such the furniture industry with offers of new technology and products and cooperation with Petronas in the oil sector.

According to Perincic, Croatia wants Malaysia Airlines (MAS) to resume flights to Zagreb to help boost business and tourism between the two countries.

He said that discussions would also be held on the possibility of establishing cooperation between the ports of the two countries to serve as gateway for each other's products and maritime transportation to the respective region -- Southeast Asia and Central Europe and the Mediterranean.

Perincic said that the government was committed to create a comprehensive and favourable framework to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and as such, Croatia welcomes Malaysia's private sector investment and joint ventures in tourism, telecommunications and the energy sector.

Describing Zagreb-Kuala Lumpur ties as "very friendly", the ambassador said that the two countries must take advantage of their strategic locations and also advancement in the science and technological field for mutual benefit in the future.

With a largely Roman Catholic population of some 4.5 million people, Croatia, which declared independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991, is pushing for strong political and economic reforms after decades of centralised economy and is expected to join the European Union (EU) in a few years' time.

Perincic said that President Mesic's 20-member delegation would include Tourism Minister Pave Zupan Ruskovic, Deputy Foreign Minister Dr Vesna Cvjetkovic Kurelec and the Director of International Relations Department, Croatian Chamber of Economy Dunja Konjevod.

On Monday, Mesic is scheduled to be accorded a state welcome followed by a courtesy call by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and attend the state banquet hosted by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Putra Jamalullail at Istana Negara.

Mesic is also scheduled to tour the Proton manufacturing plant in Shah Alam and the Multimedia Development Corporation in Cyberjaya and the Petronas Twin Towers here.

His programme includes visit to Sabah where Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat will make a courtesy call on him. The president will also visit

the Sepilok Orang Utan Sanctuary.

Mesic, who is on a regional tour of Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, leaves for Brunei Darussalam on Thursday.

Mesic, 68, once an outstanding student leader, took to politics and was elected Croatia's president in February 2000.

His visit will be the first by a Croatian head of state to Malaysia.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made official visits to the republic in December 1994 and April 1996 and a reciprocal visit was made by then Croatian Prime Minister Zlatko Matesa in March 1997.

-- BERNAMA

RV MFJ RM