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Germany-Malaysia

TIME FOR MALAYSIA TO MAKE ITSELF TRULY KNOWN IN GERMANY

By: Abdul Muin Abdul Majid

KUALA LUMPUR, March 13 (Bernama) -- Malaysia needs to boost the marketing of the country's various investment and business opportunities among potential German investors who are also now being actively courted by other countries in this region.

German ambassador to Malaysia Juergen Staks said that such opportunities in this country were not that well known among his countrymen, and the same applied to Malaysia's wonderful tourist attractions.

In this regard, he said that Malaysia should do more to lure German small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as there were many profitable niches in this country for the kind of businesses they were involved in such as high-tech telecommunications.

He said this in a recent interview in conjunction with the three-day visit by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Germany beginning Monday.

"Due to their size and budget, German SMEs will first look at East European countries and Russia which seem to be very attractive nowadays for such companies," he said.

Staks said that Dr Mahathir should clearly send the message while in Germany that it would be worthwhile for German companies to make, for example, a one-week fact-finding trip to Malaysia as the rewards would be more than satisfying.

"You have to be aware that competition, not only worldwide but also in Asia, is very, very strong and other countries near and far from Malaysia are also very attractive to German companies," he said.

According to a Wisma Putra statement, on his first official trip to Germany, the Prime Minister is scheduled to visit Munich and Berlin where he will meet German captains of industry to help remove scepticism and misinformation they may have about Malaysia.

Munich, the capital of the State of Bavaria in southern Germany, is an important high-tech industrial estate of that country.

Also, Bavaria's strength lies in its strategy of attracting SMEs in new industrial, multimedia and services companies.

It is in Munich that the Malaysian-German Business Forum will be held, aimed at informing German business people, particularly those representing the SMEs, about the possibilities of trading and investing in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir will also get the chance to sell Malaysia as an investment haven during a meeting with members of the Confederation of German Industries in Berlin.

The current German investment in Malaysia is quite sizeable and stands at about RM6 billion with 300 German companies operating in this country, mostly in electronics, telecommunications, engineering, medical and petrochemical sectors.

Official figures show that total bilateral trade stood at RM18.18 billion in 2001 with Malaysian exports to Germany valued at RM7.77 billion and imports at RM10.41 billion.

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He said that this was best demonstrated by the German-Malaysian Institute in Cheras where Malaysians who successfully underwent courses there would be snapped up by German firms.

"For German companies, it is absolutely imperative to take advantage of a labour force of high standard, and Malaysia can be very proud of having this kind of labour force," he said.

The envoy, who was posted to Malaysia in February last year, described bilateral relations between Berlin and Kuala Lumpur as "excellent" with constant dialogue being held at all levels be they in public or private sectors.

"Because we cannot really make a good job in this country or vice-versa if we do not understand each other," he said.

Staks said that it was about time that the leaders of both countries meet to exchange views not only about bilateral ties but also the current regional and global situation.

Dr Mahathir made working visits to Germany in 1988 and 1998.

On this trip, he is scheduled to meet German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder in Berlin as well as open the Malaysian embassy in that historic city which took over from Bonn as Germany's capital in 1999.

Apart from that, the German populace will also get to see tantalizing Malaysian cultural performances as the Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry undertakes a tourism promotional blitz in several cities in Germany.

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