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MAHATHIR-GERMANY

CLOSE TIES WITH GERMANY CRUCIAL FOR INVESTMENT, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, May 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says Malaysia values the close ties with Germany given that the country is a major economy and one of largest European Union investors in Malaysia.

He said that lately, Malaysia's trade with Germany had increased tremendously.

"Last year, investment from Germany was the biggest from Europe. So, it is important for us to have close relations with Germany," Dr Mahathir said when responding to questions on German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's visit to Malaysia beginning tomorrow at a press conference after officiating the 57th Malaysian Indian Congress' (MIC) annual general assembly here today.

In 2002, total bilateral trade between Malaysia and Germany increased by five percent to RM19.13 billion compared with the previous year.

The first two months of this year recorded a significant increase of 33.18 percent compared with the corresponding period last year.

Besides investment, Dr Mahathir said that Germany was also important as the country was willing to transfer its technology here.

Schroeder's visit is the first official visit by a German leader to Malaysia and is a return visit following Dr Mahathir's trip to Germany in March last year.

On MIC's request to increase the present 1.5 percent Malaysian Indian equity ownership to 3.0 per cent by 2010, Mahathir said that 1.5 percent was reasonable as Indians consist only 10 percent of the country's population.

"Before, there was no equity interest. The Chinese and the Indians were same. On the insistence of (MIC President) Datuk Seri S.Samy Vellu to have equity, we determined it based on population," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that eventhough the Malays made up 60 percent of the total population of the country, their equity interest was only 30 percent.

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