

12 MAY 2003

Germany-M'sia

CLOSER BILATERAL TIES WITH GERMANY

PUTRAJAYA, May 12 (Bernama) -- The three-day visit of German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to Malaysia will help strengthen bilateral ties between the two nations in all fields especially in the area of education, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

The visit, the first by a German chancellor to Malaysia, would help in the transfer of scientific knowledge and technological-related matters, he said after a delegation meeting between the 17-member entourage led by Schroeder and Malaysian government officials led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Prime Minister's office here.

Schroeder, who arrived here yesterday, is on a six-day tour of South-East Asian countries, with Malaysia as his first stop. He will later proceed to Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Before the delegation meeting, the two leaders had a four-eye discussion on ways to boost bilateral and economic ties between the two nations. Germany is Malaysia's biggest trading partner in the European Union.

"We have no bilateral problems with Germany. We're happy with their investment here. There're about 300 German companies operating here," Syed Hamid said.

During his meeting with Dr Mahathir, Schroeder expressed delight not only over Malaysia's development policies but also the strong stand taken by the nation on international issues, he said.

"Dr Mahathir proposed an inter-civilisation dialogue with the Germans. Germany has some 4.5 million Muslims. The Prime Minister has invited scholars from Germany to have dialogues with officials of Ikim (Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia)," he said.

Syed Hamid said that the delegation meeting was warm, "most productive and constructive not only on economic matters but also political issues".

"The two leaders also agreed that for lasting peace in the Middle East, the Palestinian issue must be resolved first. They also agreed that the United Nations should play the central role in resolving conflicts," he said.

He said that international issues discussed focused more on the Palestinian problem especially the United States' newly-proposed road map in the trouble-prone region.

Syed Hamid said that Dr Mahathir wanted more German tourists to come to Malaysia to witness the beauty of the country and how people of various religions and ethnic races live in harmony.

The Prime Minister also wanted Lufthansa, the German national airline, to fly to the KL International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang.

"Schroeder wanted more promotion to be carried out in Germany to inform their people of Malaysia and its attractions. He also mentioned that efforts should be made to ensure Germans know that Malaysia is a safe place to visit. More focus should be given to this," he said.

-- BERNAMA

SR AHH RM