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Schroeder-Visit

ECONOMIC, WORLD ISSUES TO DOMINATE SCHROEDER-MAHATHIR TALKS

KUALA LUMPUR, May 5 (Bernama) -- Economic cooperation in trade and investment, the situation in post-war Iraq and the Palestine conflict are expected to take centre stage in talks between German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during the former's three-day official visit beginning Sunday.

German Ambassador to Malaysia Jurgen A.R. Staks said the visit, the first by a German Chancellor since Kuala Lumpur and Berlin established diplomatic ties in 1958, would also be an opportunity to further strengthen existing bilateral cooperation between Asean and the European Union (EU).

"So, this visit is of the highest interest for Schroeder to get first-hand impression of what is going on in Malaysia and in the region and how we can exploit for mutual benefit and mutual profit the existing relations," he told a press conference on the visit.

Besides visiting Malaysia from May 11 at the invitation of Dr Mahathir, Schroeder will also go to Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam.

"I want to emphasise the message of this trip that the Chancellor is not going to China, Japan or South Korea... the Chancellor is exclusively concentrating on Asean and Southeast Asia, the four prominent countries that has never happened before," he said.

Schroeder's 50-member delegation includes German's Economics and Labour Minister Wolfgang Clement and Asia-Pacific Association of German Industries Chairman Dr Heinrich von Pierer.

Schroeder's tight schedule includes a meeting with Dr Mahathir, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, attend delegation meeting, have an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and deliver a talk themed "Malaysia-Germany: Partners in the Dialogue Among Civilisations" at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations.

On international issues, Staks said the German leader would discuss the restructuring of the United Nations to strengthen the world body to its position before the Iraq War.

"In this context, the Chancellor is very much determined to give this role to the UN to rebuild Iraq. This should not be done by individual countries, but under the umbrella and with the support of the UN," he said.

Asked how many German companies were committed to continue investing in Malaysia due to its own economic difficulties now, Staks said German firms were here to stay and would continue to look for opportunities.

"The reputation of Malaysia as an easy country to trade with, to invest, to cooperate, is very important to Germany. We hope the Chancellor's visit will bring new projects for companies which are already here and are competing with other companies to get projects.

"I am relatively optimistic that this will happen," he said.

There are about 300 German companies operating in Malaysia and about 2,000 German nationals are working and living in the country.

The two-way trade between Malaysia and Germany, an economic powerhouse of Europe, amounts to RM18 billion.

Staks said Dr Mahathir's visit to Germany last year was very successful.

"Again this is another signal. Usually, you reciprocate a visit after two or three years. In this case, the Chancellor is coming within 14 months... that's a clear signal.

"I wish to emphasise again that the relations between Dr Mahathir and

the Chancellor are very easy going, very friendly, open-minded and pragmatic.

"This is the kind of relationship which you really should take advantage to exploit.

"I'm quite sure the Chancellor's visit will definitely foster close ties, particularly in economic, trade and investment sectors," he added.

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