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MAHATHIR-SWEDEN

PM CALLS ON SWEDISH COs TO INVEST, DIVERSIFY AND IMPORT MORE FROM M'SIA

By: Jackson Sawatan

STOCKHOLM, Sept 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on Swedish companies to invest in and import more from Malaysia while those already operating in Malaysia should consider diversifying further.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a three-day visit to Sweden, said that Malaysia, which has a good track record as a manufacturing and export base for the world, could become the base for expansion of Swedish companies into the Asean and Asia-Pacific region.

The Prime Minister noted that despite being Malaysia's largest trading partner among Scandinavian countries, the balance of trade between both countries was heavily in Sweden's favour.

"I would like to invite Swedish importers to import more from Malaysia to narrow down the trade gap," he said at an official luncheon hosted by Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson at the official residence of the Swedish Prime Minister, here.

Dr Mahathir said that there were much more trade and investment potentials in Malaysia and around the Asean region.

"We believe that the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta) market, with a combined population of about 500 million and Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) of US\$546 billion (RM2.074 trillion) can offer Swedish companies profitable opportunities," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that Kuala Lumpur was committed to improving ties with Stockholm and in fact, bilateral relations between the two countries had been progressing satisfactorily over the years.

Besides trade, another promising area for developing further bilateral cooperation between both countries was in tourism.

"People-to-people contacts through tourism are an important aspect in promoting further understanding between our peoples. We are happy to note that Malaysia continues to be a popular destination for Swedish travellers," the Prime Minister said.

He said that visitors to Malaysia should not be alarmed by "the negative incidence in other Southeast Asian countries. We assure you that Malaysia is a safe place for tourists."

Dr Mahathir had earlier led the Malaysian delegation to a bilateral meeting with his Swedish counterpart at the office of Swedish Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir told the luncheon that both sides in the bilateral meeting had a fruitful exchange of views "on the state of our bilateral relations in which we reaffirm our desire to enhance cooperation between our two countries."

Dr Mahathir was pleased that the discussion had been very constructive and that both countries shared many things in common, particularly on the fact that there existed great potential to further develop the scope and depth of the relations.

The Prime Minister noted that Sweden, being among the most successful European countries, had won worldwide recognition for its achievements in numerous fields such as information technology (IT), biotechnology, music and sports.

"I believe there is tremendous potential for cooperation between the two countries in the fields of biotechnology and IT. Malaysia's huge biodiversity should be attractive to Swedish research and development (R&D)

institutions... Malaysia welcomes their participation," he said.

Malaysia and Sweden have worked closely together both at the bilateral and regional level and at various international fora, Dr Mahathir said.

"Exchanges of visits at various levels have further strengthened the ties of friendship between the two countries.

"The state visit by His Majesty King XVI Carl Gustaf and Her Majesty Queen Silvia to Malaysia in March 1996 has certainly brought much goodwill and understanding between the two countries.

"Malaysia is truly grateful for Sweden's acceptance of the forthcoming visit by His Majesty the Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia to Sweden in 2005," the Prime Minister said. -- BERNAMA

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