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Schroeder-Malaysia

SCHROEDER'S M'SIA VISIT UNDERSCORES "EXCELLENT BILATERAL RELATIONS"

By: Manik Mehta

BERLIN, April 15 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian ambassador to Berlin, Datuk Abdul Kadir Deen, says that the forthcoming visit of German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to Malaysia, in the course of a South-East Asian tour, will underscore the "excellent bilateral relations" between Malaysia and Germany.

Chancellor Schroeder, accompanied by his Economics Minister Wolfgang Clement and a large business delegation, will be visiting Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam from May 10 to 17.

Abdul Kadir, concurrently accredited to Switzerland and Greece, who oversaw the relocation of the Malaysian embassy from the former German capital Bonn to Berlin, said that this relocation was "one of the major challenges" of his posting.

"When I look back, I'm pleased to say that relocation from Bonn to Berlin went off smoothly. We now have a nice location in Berlin for our chancery building," he told Bernama here.

Before the embassy was relocated to Berlin on Sept 1, 1999, the ambassador has spent some six months in Bonn. "My first priority was to relocate as quickly and as smoothly as possible," he said.

It was also a coincidence that Chancellor Schroeder moved to his new office in Berlin during the same time as the Malaysian embassy did from Bonn to Berlin.

The suave and well-liked 59-year-old diplomat, who will soon go into what he described as a "young man's retirement", was actually due to return home end of the month.

But because of the upcoming Schroeder visit, he was asked to stay for another month before retiring from active diplomatic service in May. Abdul Kadir is a veteran of Malaysia's foreign service with previous postings in the Philippines, Kuwait, the United Nations in New York, China, Japan, Sri Lanka and South Africa.

Discussing his four-year tenure in Berlin, Abdul Kadir described Germany as a "marvellous posting". "It's a good way to end my career in the foreign service," he laughed.

Germany is an interesting turf for Malaysian diplomats, also because of its global significance as the world's third largest economy. "I've made some very good friends here and I'm sure I'll continue to maintain our contacts in the future," he averred.

Malaysia's proximity to the German position was also evident when the international debate on the US invasion of Iraq broke out in all ferocity.

"Our position was close to that of the Germans and French. We supported -- and continue to support -- the UN role in Iraq. Our position was that the weapons' inspectors should have been given more time in Iraq. We also support the new French-German-Russian position that the United Nations should be allowed to play a greater role in post-war Iraq," he said.

The envoy said that he felt a "great sense of achievement" that Germany had become the largest European investor in Malaysia and its biggest trading partner in the European Union (EU), even eclipsing the United Kingdom in the process.

Current two-way trade volume between Malaysia and Germany amounts to RM18 billion.

Another reason for his satisfaction with the German posting was the interest in Germany in Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir

Mohamad's visit in March 2002.

"This was the first official visit by our Prime Minister to Germany, although he had come here before that on working visits. We organised an extensive official programme for the Prime Minister, which included visits to federal states of Bavaria, Baden-Wuerttemberg and North Rhine Westfalia, apart from Berlin."

Was there anything he wished he could have done during his four-year stint in Germany.

"Yes, there's something I regret I've not done in Germany. I didn't learn the German language. But then, your interlocutors here speak such excellent English that this proves to be a disincentive for a foreign diplomat to learn the language. I'd always wanted to read the original writings in the German language rather than rely on translations," he said.

As for life after the foreign service, the ambassador said that he hoped to find something to "keep me busy in the future". "You know, I'm networking," he added with a boyish laughter.

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