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## New diplomacy from old Europe

MALAYSIA-GERMANY relations have come a long way since the days of Grundig and the old Volkswagen. Interestingly, much of the ground was covered just over the past year, culminating in the highly successful visit by Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder that ended yesterday. The significance of the German leader's two-night Kuala Lumpur itinerary goes beyond the usual courtesy visit, even if it is to reciprocate Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's trip to Germany in March last year.

First, it seems quite clear Schroeder placed considerable importance on the Malaysia visit, choosing Kuala Lumpur as the first destination in his tour of the region and spending two nights, against one night each in the Singapore, Jakarta and Hanoi legs. Secondly, as he himself said, the visit was so politically imperative that it had to take precedence over the SARS scare. And then, of course, Schroeder was here soon after the American-led invasion of Iraq, a war Germany, like Malaysia, strongly opposed.

Above all, the visit is sure to give trade and business between the two countries a big boost, as Malaysia has remained a competitive and viable investment location for companies serving the regional and global market. Dr Mahathir's visit last year paved the way for closer economic relations. Schroeder will further enhance that.

We shall henceforth see more bilateral agreements and MoUs signed at the government-to-government level to promote trade and co-operation in the areas of culture, economic, taxation, transport and technical collaboration. At the business sector level, there will be cross-flows of trade and investment and close collaboration through the Malaysia-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry. At the people-to-people level, there are already commitments that more efforts will be made for citizens to visit each other's countries and get to understand their similarities and differences.

Malaysia has for some time shied away from getting too close to European countries. But that appears to be changing with the diplomacy of leaders like Schroeder and France's Jacques Chirac. Malaysia must seek to score points on this and not take the praise showered by Schroeder for granted, even when he described Malaysia as a successful multiracial (yet Islamic) nation which can serve as a model for other countries.