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Schroeder's visit on May 11 'an historic event'

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's arrival here on May 11 will be an historic event as he is the republic's first head of government to visit Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

German Ambassador to Malaysia Juergen A.R. Staks said the visit signalled Germany's contribution to Malaysian-German and Asean-European Union relations.

"Germany is very much interested in Malaysia's assessment of the development of Asean with regard to the Asean Free Trade Area.

"Of course, you can imagine that the EU is interested in getting Afta running effectively as soon as possible because a free market system in a region like Asean is very important."

Speaking at the German Embassy here today, he said Schroeder was returning Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit to Germany last year.

"The two leaders have an open-minded, down-to-earth and pragmatic relationship.

"The governments and people of the two countries should therefore take advantage of this relationship and fully exploit it."

He said the leaders would discuss bilateral topics, particularly economics and world affairs including the restructuring of post-war Iraq, effectiveness of the United Nations and the situation in the Middle East and East Asia.