

Dr M to focus on economic ventures

PORT MORESBY, Wed. — Let's go big on economic co-operation. This will be Dr Mahathir Mohamad's thrust when he sits down to discussions with his Australian and New Zealand counterparts in the next eight days.

Dr Mahathir begins the Australian leg of his tour tomorrow, after spending two full days here where he witnessed the opening of Papua New Guinea's new national Parliament building and attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting.

He told Malaysian newsmen on the eve of his departure for Canberra that in the past, Malaysia's pre-occupation in her ties with Australia seemed to be in educational matters.

Malaysia has 9,000 students in secondary

schools and institutions of higher learning in that country and recent developments in quotas and fees and reactions to them have hogged the limelight.

But in view of Dr Mahathir's thinking and the fact that the Australian Government is not likely to come up with new policy decisions on overseas students before the end of the year, education is not expected to be given as much weight as trade and industry in the forthcoming discussions.

Newly appointed Education Minister Datuk Abdullah Haji Badawi will, nevertheless, make full use of the opportunity to get to know his Australian counterpart and get first hand views on Australian education policies.

"There is very big scope for economic co-operation. Malaysia should look to Australia and New Zealand and the

two countries should look to Malaysia, and identify areas to work in.

"Malaysia can also try and gain more access to the (larger) Australian market."

New Zealand's market is small, considering it has only three million people as against Australia's 15 million.

Dr Mahathir spoke of his vision of Malaysia being a "half-way house" for the processing of Australian and New Zealand raw materials for export.

The industrialists of the two countries could take advantage of the cheap energy sources such as gas and the relatively cheap labour in Malaysia to enable them to be more competitive with their products in world markets.

There is interest being shown along these lines and Dr Mahathir is expected to use all his persuasive powers to win them over.

Australian fruits for example, could be canned more cheaply in Malaysia

and thus become more competitive in world markets if this was done.

Dr Mahathir will have with him the Deputy Trade Minister, Mr Oo Gin Sun, the Deputy Finance Minister, Dr Tan Tiong Hong, and Deputy Primary Industries Minister, Encik Megat Junid.

Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen until recently the Trade and Industry Minister and now the Foreign Minister, is expected to play a dual role.

On access to Australian markets, Dr Mahathir said that it would not do if Malaysian businessmen stayed at home and did their business through other people and went to Australia only on holiday.

Deficit

Also, buying property in Australia is not a good thing in itself. What was needed was aggressive sales of Malaysian products in order to make money.

The 40 accompanying top Malaysian businessmen drawn from banking, mining and industry are scheduled to meet their Australian and New Zealand counterparts.

They can be expected to take the Prime Minister's cue in what they should set out to do.

Malaysia has a sizeable trade deficit with Australia and New Zealand. How this can be bridged should figure prominently in the discussions.

Malaysia is poised to import coal for power plants and iron for a new steel plant and this could be a point for greater consideration for Malaysian goods seeking entry into Australia.

The official programme has it that Dr Mahathir will meet his counterpart Mr Bob Hawke tomorrow evening.

On Friday, he could possibly have another round of discussions with Mr Hawke.