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INDIA - MAHATHIR
BY AZMAN UJANG

KUALA LUMPUR, JUNE 6 (BERNAMA) -- INDIA HAS PRAISED PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD FOR HIS VISION OF THE FUTURE FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES OF THE SOUTH.

INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTER I.K. GUJRAL SAID THE SOUTH NEEDED DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR'S LEADERSHIP TO EVOLVE NEW SOLUTIONS AND APPROACHES TO FACE THE CHALLENGES CONFRONTING DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

HE ADDED: +THE TYPE OF LEADERSHIP WHICH THE PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA HAS PROVIDED HAS IMPRESSED EVERYBODY.+

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR NOT ONLY HAS A VERY CHARMING PERSONALITY BUT HE IS ALSO A MAN OF IDEAS AND VISION OF THE FUTURE AND MADE VERY POSITIVE AND WHOLESOME CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GROUP OF 15 (G-15) SUMMIT HERE,+ ENCIK GUJRAL TOLD BERNAMA IN AN INTERVIEW HERE YESTERDAY.

ENCIK GUJRAL, WHO ACCOMPANIED INDIAN PRIME MINISTER V.P. SINGH TO THE INAUGURAL SUMMIT OF THE SOUTH-SOUTH GROUP OF CONSULTATION AND COOPERATION WHICH ENDED HERE SUNDAY, SAID INDIA FELT +VERY COMFORTABLE+ THAT SUCH A CLOSE ASIAN NEIGHBOUR LIKE MALAYSIA WAS BEING LED BY A PERSONALITY LIKE DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR.

HE ADDED THAT IT WAS A +VERY HAPPY OPPORTUNITY+ FOR ENCIK V.P. SINGH TO VISIT MALAYSIA, THE FIRST BY AN INDIAN PRIME MINISTER IN 22 YEARS, TO EMPHASISE THE NEED FOR CLOSER COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WHICH HAD SO MUCH IN COMMON IN TERMS OF HISTORY AND CULTURE. -- MORE

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THE INDIAN PRIME MINISTER MADE A THREE-DAY STATE VISIT TO MALAYSIA AFTER THE SUMMIT DURING WHICH HE HELD TALKS WITH HIS MALAYSIAN COUNTERPART ON CLOSER BILATERAL TRADE, INVESTMENT AND CULTURAL COOPERATION.

DESCRIBING INDIA-MALAYSIA RELATIONS AS +EXTREMELY GOOD AND FRIENDLY+ ENCIK GUJRAL SAID THE TALKS HELPED TO FURTHER ENHANCE BILATERAL TIES AND EXPLORED NEW AREAS OF COOPERATION, ESPECIALLY IN AREAS WHERE INDIA COULD USE ITS TECHNOLOGICAL EDGE TO ASSIST IN MALAYSIA'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.

THESE INCLUDED THE ENERGY SECTOR WHERE JOINT VENTURES COULD BE CONSIDERED, SUCH AS IN SETTING UP HYDRO-ELECTRIC PROJECTS.

HE ALSO SAID INDIA WAS PREPARED TO PROVIDE MALAYSIA WITH EXPERTISE TO SET UP INSTITUTES OF HIGHER LEARNING, ESPECIALLY MEDICAL COLLEGES, AS A LONG-TERM SOLUTION TO SOLVING MALAYSIA'S OWN GROWING NEED FOR DOCTORS.

HE SUGGESTED THAT THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT LOOK INTO THE POSSIBILITY OF RECOGNISING MEDICAL DEGREES FROM MORE INDIAN COLLEGES INSTEAD OF ONLY A SMALL NUMBER AT PRESENT WHICH HAD RESULTED IN LIMITED PLACES FOR MALAYSIAN STUDENTS IN SUCH COLLEGES IN INDIA. -- MORE

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HE GAVE THE ASSURANCE THAT THE NUMBER OF PLACES FOR MALAYSIAN MEDICAL STUDENTS IN INDIAN MEDICAL COLLEGES WOULD NOT BE REDUCE. MALAYSIAN STUDENTS MADE UP ABOUT HALF OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN INDIA.

ENCIK GUJRAL SAID THE SUMMIT HERE WAS A LANDMARK MEETING IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT WHERE ALL DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WERE FACING PROBLEMS OF FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES IN TRADE, EXTERNAL DEBT AND FLOW OF RESOURCES.

+THE SUMMIT HAS ENABLED US TO ZERO IN-ON THE COMMON APPROACHES TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING US WITHOUT WHICH NONE OF US CAN ESCAPE THE TYPE OF CONSEQUENCES STARING AT US,+ HE ADDED.

HE CITED AS AN EXAMPLE THE PRODUCERS OF COMMODITIES AND OTHER RAW MATERIALS WHOSE PRICES WERE DICTATED BY CONSUMER COUNTRIES WHICH AT THE SAME TIME WERE INCREASINGLY DENYING THEM NEW MARKETS.

SIMILARLY, THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE RATIOS WERE MANIPULATED NOT BECAUSE THERE WAS MORE MONEY BUT BECAUSE OF THE SHARP RISE IN THE EXCHANGE RATE OF THE YEN AGAINST THE US DOLLAR, HE SAID.

+SO FOR COUNTRIES LIKE MALAYSIA WHICH HAVE TAKEN YEN LOANS, THEIR DEBT BURDEN AUTOMATICALLY RISES WITHOUT THEM BORROWING MORE,+ HE ADDED. -- BERNAMA

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