

Partners in development

From A. Kadir Jasin

HANOI, Sun. -- Malaysia has pledged to share its development experience with Vietnam and provide it with development assistance.

In return, it hopes Malaysian entrepreneurs and businessmen will be accepted as "genuine and sincere partners in economic development".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told his host tonight that the assistance is offered in the spirit of friendship and co-operation.

Malaysia believes that economically stable and prosperous neighbours will contribute to the peace and security of the region.

He was speaking at a dinner hosted by Vietnamese Premier Vo Van Kiet at the Hanoi Cultural Palace.

Dr Mahathir said recent developments in the world had convinced Malaysia that countries in the region had no choice but to work closely together.

The end of the East-West confrontation and the emergence of new political and economic groupings, each concerned with its own regional interests first, make it more urgent and necessary for those in Southeast and East Asia to come together and plan for the future on a regional basis.

He said failure to do so would put countries in the region at a disadvantage.

It is for this reason that Asean is taking steps to bring about the realisation of an Asean free trade arrangement within 15 years.

ity in the entire region."

Malaysia envisages the establishment of a prosperous community of Southeast Asian nations linked together by a strong commitment to co-operate for peace, progress and stability.

A region where people travel freely, where trade and investment flow with little or no restriction and scientists and scholars can train and be at par with those in developed countries.

He also said the events of the past should be *lessons* for the future. "Never should we allow conflicts and confrontation to arise and stultify our relations."

Turning to outstanding issues in bilateral relations, Dr Mahathir said the two still outstanding were the questions of overlapping claims in the South China Sea and the Vietnamese boat people in Malaysia.

"We had agreed in Kuala Lumpur to settle these issues peacefully through negotiations. We are confident that with friendship and spirit of understanding that exist among us today, these issues could be settled quickly in the manner we had envisaged together," said Dr Mahathir.

He is confident the joint commission the two countries had agreed to set up would provide an excellent mechanism to manage co-operative efforts.

In his speech, Van Kiet said that within a short period of just a year, the Government and people of the two countries had achieved a

Other institutional arrangements have also been agreed upon to ensure that Asean becomes a truly effective organisation to meet future challenges, guarantee development and promote peace and stability in the region.

Although progress in trade and economic co-operation had been encouraging, he said a vast potential still remained to be tapped.

There is a need to continue to build upon the success achieved for mutual benefit.

"The fact that I have brought with me a large delegation from the private sector bears testimony to the seriousness of our desire to see relations between our two countries accelerate to greater heights."

The volume of trade between Malaysia and Vietnam rose some 66 per cent to US\$250 (\$625m) million in 1991 from \$150 million (\$375m) in 1990. Investments have also been substantial, in just a few months. Malaysian investments in Vietnam total \$67.5 million (\$168m).

Among Malaysian companies with investments in Vietnam are Petronas, Public Bank and Golden Hope.

Dr Mahathir said this evidence of the growing confidence in Vietnam was the result of the "pragmatic economic policy pursued by the Vietnamese Government."

He added that while the six Asean countries could play the role it is envisaged that they, together with all the other Southeast Asian countries, will provide "a truly formidable force of peace, progress and stabil-

great deal in initiating mutual trust and co-operation.

The Vietnamese people had been receptive to the experiences that Malaysia had gone through, adding that the two nations shared a common historical background and similarities in culture and development endeavour.

Van Kiet also noted that Malaysians had been willing to share their experiences with his country.

The Vietnamese leader, who heralded Dr Mahathir's visit as opening a new era in the relationship between the two countries, said considerable understanding and trust had developed among government officials and businessmen of the two countries.

"Given such development, I am convinced deep in my heart that friendship and co-operation between our two countries will witness a brilliant future."

Recalling Dr Mahathir's statement in Kuala Lumpur during his official visit last year, the Vietnamese leader said what he then hoped had now become a reality.

He said bilateral co-operation between Malaysia and Vietnam had accelerated since then.

Describing Dr Mahathir's visit, the first by a Malaysian Prime Minister, Van Kiet said it was a milestone in bilateral co-operation between the two countries.

He hoped the furthering of co-operation between his country and Malaysia would contribute to the peace and prosperity of Southeast Asia.
