

Enhance bilateral ties, Dr M tells Tunisia

From (P. 9. 6. 7.)
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TUNIS (Tunisia), Tues. — Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** said Malaysia and Tunisia should identify new areas of cooperation to take bilateral relations to new level of achievement.

Dr Mahathir said the two countries are now better placed to help each other in economic endeavours to bring about closer rapport among developing countries.

Dr Mahathir said this at a dinner hosted by Tunisian Prime Minister Mr Hamed Karoui tonight.

"Malaysia and Tunisia today are in a position to supply each other with many of their requirements for specific items of manufactured goods and machinery produced by their respective manufacturers.

"I see an enormous potential to boost our bilateral trade. I am confident that with the Bilateral Payment Arrangement and the trade agreement, our two countries' bilateral trade will increase in the years to come."

The Prime Minister added that the need to strengthen economic relations between developing countries has made South-South cooperation even more necessary and urgent.

This is particularly true in the light of several changes taking place recently.

Dr Mahathir said the attention paid by the rich industrialised North to the economic reconstruction of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union means that less attention will be paid to the developing countries of the South.

The deadlock in the Uruguayan round of multilateral trade negotiations under the auspices of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the emergence of trade blocs with protectionist tendencies, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) and the European single market, would put developing countries which depend exclusively on the North for their market at a great disadvantage.

He added that issues of the environment, human rights and intellectual property become valid excuses for the North to erect trade barriers against the South.

Against such a scenario, South-South cooperation offers an excellent avenue for defending the economic interest of developing countries.

Dr Mahathir said: "I have just returned from the sum-

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mit meeting of the Group for South-South Cooperation and Consultation, in Senegal, where several issues affecting South-South and North-South relations have been discussed.

"It was agreed that further efforts should be made to encourage and expand South-South cooperation. It is our hope that Tunisia would consider joining the South Investment, Trade and Technology Data Exchange Centre (SITTDEC) and benefit from its services.

"Apart from enhancing bilateral trade between us, other areas of cooperation should also be identified, for Malaysia and Tunisia possess expertise in different fields of science and technology.

"We note the excellence of the Tunisian institutions of higher learning where Malaysian students could pursue their studies in Islam and other professional fields.

"Tunisian students could also enrol in our institutions of higher learning, such as the International Islamic University in Kuala

Lumpur, which offers courses in various disciplines."

The Prime Minister also paid tribute to Tunisian efforts in international diplomacy, in particular its efforts to bring about peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

Dr Mahathir said Tunisia's resolute stand in helping Islamic countries and its readiness to work for peace and stability between nations is indeed laudable.

"An example is your unqualified support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people."