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Mahathir-ECO

MAHATHIR CALLS FOR CLOSER ASEAN-ECO-SAARC COOPERATION

From Amin Husaini Harun

MAHATHIR OVERSEAS TRIPS

ISLAMABAD, Feb 15 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called for closer collaboration between Asean, the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) in the South Asia region and the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in enhancing economies of the two regions.

"We welcome closer collaboration between ECO, SAARC and Asean," the prime minister said in his speech at a banquet hosted by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, here.

"To strive for greater unity and cooperation among developing countries, we need to maintain a dialogue among ourselves in order to promote solidarity, to strengthen each other's efforts to advance ourselves and to have a common response to the critical economic developments that are taking place in the world, especially the emergence of powerful trade blocs," he said.

On the ECO, he said Malaysia had followed its development with interest.

Dr Mahathir said that with the inclusion of seven more countries of central Asia, an important economic nexus had emerged which would be crucial in guaranteeing the development, and stability of the central and south Asian regions.

On Malaysia's relationship with Pakistan, he noted that it had always been warm and friendly and Malaysia looked forward to working closely in strengthening political and economic relations, as well as enhancing world peace and equality in international relations. -- more

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In the long term, Malaysia looked to Pakistan as a potential gateway to the palm oil market in Afghanistan and the central Asian republic using Pakistan's air, sea and road links with these states.

Following the successful visit of the ministerial and business delegation from Malaysia last year, joint ventures with Pakistani partners were being proposed to establish integrated palm oil storage and refining complexes in the port cities of Pakistan, he said.

Dr Mahathir said that of special importance was the fact that Pakistan was Malaysia's largest single buyer of palm oil in this region, this being a recent phenomenon following the decrease in soya bean oil import by Pakistan.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia was studying the possibility of its national airline, MAS, operating additional frequencies into Pakistan and beyond to strengthen the air link between the two countries.

He said an important area of Malaysia-Pakistan cooperation was the training received by students under the Pakistan Technical Assistance Programme and Malaysia hoped to see this programme expanded, especially to accommodate Malaysia's requirement for medical training. -- more

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The prime minister said Malaysia hoped to recruit more Pakistanis to work in the industrial and plantation sectors which presently are experiencing labour shortages.

On politics, he said Malaysia and Pakistan had worked together in support of each other on many issues of common concern, especially in the UN the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

He said Pakistan, a member of the UN Security Council, could do much to address the new challenges that were being faced by the world as a result of the end of the cold war.

"We share the concern over action taken by a few powerful countries to promote their own interests without taking it into account the views of the international community.

"Instead of even handed initiative, we see the UN mandate exploited for narrow self-interest as in the case of the recent unjustifiable attack on Iraq while the horror of the situation in Bosnia remains unaddressed," he said. -- more

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Dr Mahathir said Malaysia appreciated Pakistan's role in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

" We sincerely hope that, that that war-ravaged country will soon be able to get down to the enormous task of the reconstruction and development that they are faced with, " he said.

On the problem of Kashmir, which had bedevilled the relationship between Pakistan and India for over four decade, Dr Mahathir hoped it could be resolved amicably through peaceful negotiations in accordance with UN resolution and the Simla Accord. -- Bernama

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