

PM: Closer economic links with China ^{NST 1/8/93} can only bring good

By Vijayan Menon

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said economic linkages between Malaysia and China would grow in the future, bringing with it more mutual benefits and closer understanding.

The Prime Minister said he foresaw the development of greater co-operation between the Governments of Malaysia and China as the economies of the two countries expanded.

"At the same time, there will inevitably be more contacts between the peoples of our two countries.

"Whether through Government or private sponsorship, these exchanges of visits will bring benefits to both sides."

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the Malaysia-China Friendship Association's dinner at Istana Hotel tonight.

The time has now come to maximise the positive aspects of the links between the Malaysians and the Chinese of mainland China.

"There is a lot of benefit to be derived from the linkages and the friendship of Malaysian and Chinese peoples. Today Malaysians are investing and helping to develop China."

Dr Mahathir said China with its 1.2 billion people was the biggest importer of Malaysian palm oil.

The Chinese are also investing and proposing many joint venture projects in Malaysia.

"The economic linkages and interaction between China and Malaysia will grow in the future. And it will be to the benefit of both countries.

"In order that there should be greater understanding of each other and to promote greater co-operation in other fields besides economics, a body such as the MCFA is useful."

As a non-governmental body, the MCFA is in a better position to take initiatives without committing

the Governments. It will not be hamstrung by bureaucratic red tape or formalities.

"On the other hand, if its initiative is contrary to official policies, it will not be difficult to reverse or to drop it."

Yet it can prove useful in creating the right climate for commerce. Contacts and networks are crucial in business.

"Nothing facilitates trade more than the closeness of the relationship between the individuals doing the business. Doing business with total strangers is fraught with all kinds of risks."

Dr Mahathir said the association could provide a forum for individuals in Malaysia who were interested in China to meet.

"A counterpart association in China can provide similar facilities for Chinese nationals in China. The contact and interaction between the two associations will provide the opportunities for Malaysian and Chinese businessmen to meet."

He said the association could provide information on China to increase the knowledge of Malaysians about things Chinese.

"This should include the culture and way of life of the Chinese. There is no doubt that such knowledge will not only promote friendship and understanding but will also facilitate commerce and trade.

"Misunderstandings too can be eliminated or tackled early."

He said the relationship between the two countries had not been good for a long time because of ideological differences.

"The past is very much forgotten and in many ways irrelevant."

Dr Mahathir said China now recognised that Malaysia was an independent nation with its own citizens.

"That some of the Malaysians have roots in China is an accident of history. The roots are not denied. Indeed,

they are acknowledged along with lingual affinities.

"If they contribute towards easy friendship, that is not a bad thing. Malaysia also recognises China as an independent nation," he said.

The fact that a lot of Malaysians have roots in China is accepted but they are Malaysians and their relationship with China is based on their being Malaysians, albeit with Chinese roots.

"If this contributes towards easier contacts and understanding, it is welcomed.

"Ideologically we are still different. But Malaysia's policy is to ignore these differences in the conduct of her foreign relations.

"As much as we do not wish to export or impose our ideology on others, we are sure others, including China, will not want to propagate its ideology here.

"Nor should we want to interfere in the internal affairs of each other. These parameters need to be understood and propagated by the MCFA."

He said it was a matter of constant surprise for the Malays to find that there were more Muslims in China than Malays in Malaysia.

There was a healthy curiosity, he said, which could help foster understanding and friendship between the two peoples.

Chinese Ambassador Jin Guihua said the Chinese leadership attached great importance to the strengthening of the long-standing friendship between Malaysia and China.

He said Dr Mahathir had made indelible contributions towards the development of Malaysia-China friendship.

"It is precisely after his assuming premiership and thanks to his liberal policies and foresight that the friendly co-operative relationship between the two nations has grown by leaps and bounds and entered a new era," he said.