

Dr M: Manila and KL keen to enhance ties

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By Ahmad Talib

MANILA, Thurs. — There is now a genuine interest between Malaysia and the Philippines to rediscover commonalities which will help enhance bilateral relations between the two countries, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said today.

The Prime Minister said that with his visit the peoples of Malaysia and the Philippines would continue to get to know each other, to co-operate and to eventually resolve their problems for the sake of their common future and the future of the region.

The Prime Minister said this in his speech at the official dinner hosted by President Fidel Ramos at the Malacanang Palace tonight.

Dr Mahathir said his meeting with Ramos earlier today revealed that the two leaders shared common concern over many issues and that their views and aspirations coincided.

Dr Mahathir said: "It reaffirms our faith that in you and your Government, we Malaysians have a friend and partner whom we can work with to bring relations between our two countries to even greater heights.

"I feel gratified that all the agreements reached in Kuala Lumpur are being seriously looked into by officials of our two countries and progress has been made in many areas of co-operation."

Foreign Trips
with the Philippines through the Malaysian Technical Co-operation Programme.

There are many areas in which the Malaysian experience can prove useful, the Prime Minister said, adding that there is potential for both countries to co-operate in fields such as agriculture, tourism, transport and science and technology.

Dr Mahathir said the emergence of powerful economic groupings that promote specific regional interests was a matter of great concern to Malaysia.

"We strongly believe in the maintenance and enhancement of free trade globally. We are against these discriminatory measures aimed only to protect specific interests at the expense of the small and economically weak nations."

"The successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round of GATT has given some hope for a better global trading environment.

"But we must remember that we are economically weak still. Level playfields which the big nations talk so much about are quite meaningless when the contest is between giants and midgets."

Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah, arrived here this morning accompanied by several Cabinet Ministers. They were greeted on arrival at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport by Filipino dignitaries led by Vice-President Joseph Es-

trada. Dr Mahathir made special mention of an agreement to specify border-crossing arrangements along the common borders of Malaysia and the Philippines to combat illegal entry, smuggling and piracy.

The Prime Minister said he was also satisfied that there had been a considerable increase of Malaysian investments in the Philippines.

He said a few major Malaysian corporations had already established their presence in the Philippines. Many others have also shown similar interest and this is reflected by the number of businessmen accompanying the Prime Minister on his visit here.

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that the meeting between the Malaysian businessmen and Filipino Government officials as well as their counterparts would result in greater awareness of the economic opportunities available in the Philippines.

Dr Mahathir said: "As Malaysians are encouraged to seek business opportunities in the Philippines through trade and investments, Filipino entrepreneurs and businessmen are welcomed to do likewise in Malaysia where opportunities abound due to its rapid industrial development."

He added that Malaysia was ready to exchange its development experience

trada.

Dr Mahathir then attended an official welcoming ceremony which was highlighted by a 19-gun salute.

Soon after, the Prime Minister held a four-eyed meeting with Ramos at the Malacanang Palace. The two leaders then joined their Cabinet colleagues for further talks on bilateral relations.

Tomorrow, Dr Mahathir will take part in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Rizal Monument which will be followed by a meeting with leaders of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

This will be followed by a dialogue between the Prime Minister and Filipino businessmen hosted by the Philippines Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In the evening, Dr Mahathir will meet members of the Malaysian community residing in the Philippines at a reception hosted by the Malaysian ambassador, Datuk Zainuddin Abdul Rahman.

On Saturday, Dr Mahathir will visit the Subic Bay where he will be briefed on the progress of the conversion of the former American military base into an industrial, commercial and investment centre.

On Sunday, Dr Mahathir will visit Davao, in the southern part of the Philippines, before leaving for home.