

PM: Strive to strengthen ties

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By Jeffrey Ramayah

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — There is a need to preserve understanding, strengthen goodwill and nurture co-operation among nations in the region given the changes and developments politically, economically and technologically throughout the world, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said there was a need for countries in the region to create conditions to enable them to move forward to meet the various challenges.

"The fostering of friendship and good neighbourliness among us would contribute to a stable, peaceful and prosperous region.

"We should speak with one voice on issues of common concern. We should endeavour to solve problems among ourselves in a peaceful manner," he said at the official dinner held at Sri Perdana in honour of the general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Do Muoi.

Dr Mahathir also reiterated his view that all the 10 countries in Southeast Asia should eventually become members of Asean.

The countries are Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Only six are members of Asean.

Dr Mahathir said he was happy to note that relations between Vietnam and Malaysia were developing in an excellent manner and added that efforts on both sides in promoting these relations and co-operation during the last few years had brought about many positive results.

"We can be proud of this and we should strive to maintain and further develop the relations. Co-operation between our two countries can be expanded further to cover other areas," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there was a marked increase in trade between Malaysia and Vietnam over the last two years and the scope was wide for a further increase in the volume of trade and the conclusion of the bilateral payments arrangements (BPA) between the two countries had to a large extent contributed to this increase.

"This shows that the BPA is an innovative and viable mechanism in promoting trade between and among developing countries," he said.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia recognises and admires the vast potential for Vietnam's economic growth and development. Vietnam also has abundant natural resources.

"Its people are hard working and we believe we can form a genuine partnership in various economic activities for mutual benefit.

"It is with this in mind that the Malaysian Government has encouraged Malaysians to invest in Vietnam and I am glad they have responded well," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was also happy that a Malaysian consortium has successfully begun the development of an Export Processing Zone in Danang with its official launching on March 22.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia followed with great interest the efforts to promote economic development that were being undertaken in Vietnam and added that these efforts had already brought about some impressive results.

He said he was confident that with the correct approach and sound policies, the Vietnamese Government could bring about more significant economic achievements.

"Malaysia welcomes the decision by President Bill Clinton to lift the American trade embargo on Vietnam in February this year. This is good for both the United States and Vietnam.

"It should create a more favourable condition for Vietnam to continue with its development efforts.

"I am confident that with your pragmatic approach and strong commitment to development, peace and stability, Vietnam will grow and prosper like the rest of Southeast Asia," said Dr Mahathir.