

Traders told to use Turkey's unique position

From Hardev Kaur

ANKARA, Wed. Malaysian businessmen have been urged to take advantage of Turkey's "unique position" as a gateway to the vast markets of the European Union, West Asia and the Central Asian states.

Turkey is situated at the crossroads of Europe, West Asia and Central Asia.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is on a three-day visit to Turkey and the first leg of his three nation visit, said Malaysia had learnt about Turkey's success in seeking opportunities in the Central Asian Republics.

"Malaysia is keen to explore the possibilities of collaboration with Turkey in that region," Dr Mahathir told his hosts.

In his speech at the official dinner hosted by his Turkish counterpart, Prof Dr Tansu Ciller, last night, he noted that while co-operation between the two countries in several areas were expanding, the "potential has not been fully exploited".

"Trade between the two countries is still small. We need to inject more substance to our collaboration so as to tap the full potential of trade and economic opportunities available in each other's countries," he said.

He added that with mutual commitment towards strengthening of bilateral co-operation, a greater flow of trade, investment and tourism between the two countries could be further facilitated.

Dr Mahathir said the private sectors of the two countries should be encouraged to take the lead and act as a catalyst in fostering direct economic and trade linkages between the two countries.

"It is for this reason that I have included in my delegation prominent Malaysian businessmen to enable them to identify business opportunities," he added.

Malaysia, the Prime Minister said, had taken steps not only to be a major consumer of technology but also a contributor to new technologies and scientific discoveries.

He expressed confidence that there would be many areas Malaysia and Turkey could learn from each other in their march towards industrialisation.

The pooling of expertise, exchange of complementary technical capabilities, and sharing of experiences are made more relevant as the two countries are industrialising, and largely Muslim, states.

Dr Mahathir paid tribute to the "pragmatic approaches" taken by the Turkish Government and the liberalisation programmes that have made a positive impact on the country's development.

On international matters, he said the end of the Cold War had unfortunately not made the world "a better and safer place".

For many countries and nations, free market and greatness of democracy "have been disastrous".

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In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the lure of independence and democracy has resulted in hundreds of thousands being massacred and millions being forced to leave their homeland.

"The great protagonists of democracy in the West merely look on while their converts are massacred and raped," he said, adding that "it is a mistake to think that we can depend on others for our safety."

The Prime Minister said all the talk about human rights, workers' rights and the freedom of democracy were merely to justify interventions when their interests were at stake.

In view of this, Dr Mahathir said "perhaps it is worthwhile for our two countries to continuously consult one another regarding policies and strategies in a unipolar world."

He noted that Malaysia and Turkey shared many common ideals and principles.