

Enhance KL-Dhaka ties via groupings, says Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Bilateral relations between Malaysia and Bangladesh can be further strengthened through the South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation and Asean, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said both groupings were committed to promoting intra-regional trade.

Co-operation between the SAARC and Asean would certainly complement efforts towards promoting free trade among nations, he said.

"Towards this end, some form of dialogue among ourselves is imperative to enable a common approach to be adopted.

"Malaysia's commitment to South-South co-operation, among others, is evidenced in the Malaysian Technical Co-operation Programme under which technical co-operation is extended to developing countries in areas where we have the experience and expertise."

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a dinner hosted by him for Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at Seri Perdana.

He said that besides technical co-operation projects, Malaysia was also able to offer some scholarships and training awards to Bangladeshis.

To date, 148 Bangladeshis have benefited from study visits and attachment programmes covering a number of disciplines.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's rapid economic development in recent years was because of, among others, its political stability, consistency of policies and the various incentives offered to both local and foreign investors.

"Such has been the success of this approach that we now have full employment. We must now rely on foreign labour.

"In this context, I wish to acknowledge the significant human resource contribution by Bangladesh.

"As a matter of policy, we will continue to welcome the intake of manpower from Bangladesh."

Dr Mahathir said the comparative advantages which Bangladesh possessed combined with Malaysia's capital and technological know-how could provide the basis for new ventures that would benefit both countries.

He said that in order to tap the full potential of economic opportunities in both the countries, it was imperative that both Governments facilitate the mobilisation of resources of the private sectors.

"The enhancement of economic co-operation among developing countries is a priority in Malaysia. The potential in this area with Bangladesh is encouraging."

Dr Mahathir said that although trade between the two countries might be small, accounting for only 0.8 per cent of Malaysia's total external trade, there was, however, a positive trend.

Last year, total bilateral trade amounted to RM194 million, an increase of 4.8 per cent over the previous

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PM confident trade imbalance will improve

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year's figure.

Dr Mahathir was confident that the existing trade imbalance between the two countries would gradually improve given the favourable trade and investment climate in Bangladesh.

This was in addition to the commitment by both Governments to encourage the private sectors to work towards closer economic collaboration, he said.

Dr Mahathir said there were many areas of co-operation between the two countries such as the recruitment of workers from Bangladesh, cultural exchanges, aviation, investment protection, trade and business development and technical assistance.

He said both countries had worked closely in support of each other in various international forums on many issues of common concern, including the Unit-

ed Nations, Non-Aligned Movement, Commonwealth and Organisation of Islamic Conference.

Both also shared common positions on issues ranging from the environment and development to Bosnia-Herzegovina, he said.

"Despite shortcomings of the United Nations, both countries have contributed significantly towards strengthening its role in maintaining international peace and security, particularly in peacekeeping operations."

He said Malaysia was deeply disturbed by the tragedy in Bosnia-Herzegovina where blatant Serbian aggression had been allowed to continue with impunity.

"The sending of troops from Malaysia and Bangladesh for UN peacekeeping missions demonstrates our readiness to provide safety to the helpless and uphold

the principles of justice and human dignity in warring situations."

In her speech, Khaleda Zia said Malaysian investors were welcome to take advantage of the excellent investment opportunities offered by her country which she described as "a fertile ground for foreign investments".

"We hope that the present trade imbalances between the two countries would be reduced through a more innovative policy response from the Malaysian Government," she said, adding that Bangladesh also expected special market access in Malaysia for its goods.

On Bangladeshi nationals working in Malaysia, she said her country would continue to respond to Malaysia's needs for more competitive and disciplined work force.

She also praised Malaysia for its consistent stance on the Bosnian issue.