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Mahathir-Kazakhstan

TRANS-ASIA RAILWAY LINE CAN BE LINKED WITH CENTRAL ASIA

By: Rachman Norodin

ALMATY (KAZAKHSTAN), July 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight the Trans-Asia Railway Line connecting Southeast Asia with China can be linked to Kazakhstan as it provides an important road and rail link between East Asia, Russia and Europe.

He said it would be the logical step to eventually link this system which runs from Singapore to Kunming in China with the railway system in Central Asia passing via and through Kazakhstan.

"Kazakhstan is indeed located in a strategic position in Euro-Asia between China, an important neighbour which is in the process of becoming an important economic power, and the Russian Federation in the north, and to the West the whole of the European Continent," he said at a dinner hosted by Kazakhstan president Nursultan Nazarbayev here.

Dr Mahathir is in the republic for a three-day official visit after concluding a three-day visit to neighbouring Kyrgyz Republic.

The Prime Minister is accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali and members of his entourage include five Cabinet ministers, three menteri besar and a chief minister.

Also accompanying him is an 81-member business delegation headed by Malaysia Airlines chairman and chief executive Tan Sri Tajuddin Ramli.

Dr Mahathir said that since trade involved transportation of people and goods, Malaysia sees Kazakhstan providing an important road and rail link between East Asia, Russia and Europe.

The Prime Minister said a rail link via and through Kazakhstan would give many land-bound Central Asian nations access to the sea.

"Already you can gain access to the Persian Gulf through the recently completed Iran-Turkmenistan railway," he said.

Dr Mahathir stressed that as a trading nation, Malaysia had to promote trade and economic cooperation with other countries.

He said Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian countries offered good prospects for trade, "which will of course be two-way".

Dr Mahathir said he firmly believed that Malaysia and Kazakhstan needed to inject more substance into their collaboration to tap the full potentials of the opportunities available in the two countries.

The private sectors of both countries should be encouraged to take the lead and act as a catalyst in fostering direct economic and trade linkages, he said.

"It is for this reason that my delegation includes many prominent Malaysian businessmen. This visit will indeed give them the opportunity to learn more about your country and its business potentials and to establish contacts with their counterparts here," he said.

The Prime Minister said he was confident that with the strong mutual commitment towards enhancing bilateral cooperation, a greater flow of trade, investment and tourism between the two countries could be realised.

He pointed out that Malaysia and Kazakhstan seemed to have identical policies on the need to foster close and binding relations with their immediate neighbours.

Dr Mahathir said the two countries also strongly shared the view that "regionalism is the wave of the future"

He said: "We have found from our experience that close consultations and cooperation on a region-wide basis over a period of time have contributed to mutual confidence and habits of cooperation which not only

contribute to an environment of peace and stability but also to one of rapid development."

He said Malaysia was impressed by Kazakhstan's role in fostering such a climate of peace and development in the Central Asian region.

Dr Mahathir explained that Malaysia had found that while other models of development were attractive, they often had to be adapted to suit its needs.

He reiterated that Malaysia, in sharing its experiences in economic development, would always be sensitive to Kazakhstan's nation-building efforts.

"Indeed, we are ready to exchange information on our political experience as well," he said, adding that the two countries could learn by sharing experiences and the exchange of complementary technical capabilities and technologies. -- BERNAMA

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