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Mahathir-Balkan

BALKANS TO BE GATEWAY FOR MALAYSIAN GOODS IN EASTERN EUROPE

SKOPJE, April 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia hopes to use the Balkan states, particularly Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia as distribution points for its goods to penetrate the Eastern European market, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said although Malaysia's trade with Eastern Europe was still small, there was obviously great potential for goods from Malaysia to be marketed in most of the countries in the region.

"At the same time we will identify items that could be imported from this region," he said at a joint news conference with his Macedonian counterpart, Branko Crvenkovski, at the end of his tour of the the Balkan states, here.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would also identify ports and airports in the three Balkan states which could be used as conduits to enhance trade between Malaysia and the Eastern Europe region.

"Our trade has for a long time been confined to certain European countries and Japan but we are now expanding our scope to have trading contact with Latin America and Eastern Europe," he said.

On trade ties with Macedonia, the Prime Minister said that although the former Yugoslavia republic was a small country, there were great business opportunities which could be explored by the Malaysian private sector.

Macedonia declared its independence from the rump Yugoslavia on Sept 8, 1991 and was admitted to the United Nations in 1993. Malaysia was the first among the Asia-Pacific nations to recognise its independence.

Macedonia has a population of 2.2 million mostly Eastern Orthodox Christian with about 22 per cent Muslims. It is involved in the steel and cement industries while its main crops are wheat, cotton and tobacco.

Dr Mahathir also noted that Macedonia have many skilled workers and there was no shortage of workforce in the country.

The Prime Minister expressed satisfaction on his discussions with Crvenkovski, adding that several areas of cooperation had been identified.

Crvenkovski noted that Malaysia had achieved tremendous economic growth and expressed hopes that it could share Malaysia's experience in building its economy.

He also thanked Malaysia for being among the first country to recognise its independence.

He gave an assurance to Malaysian businessmen that foreign investors would be treated equally with local businessmen in undertaking projects in the country.

Dr Mahathir later had discussions with President of the Assembly of Macedonia Tito Petkovski before being entertained to lunch hosted by Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov.

The Prime Minister and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali later left for Malta for a two-day working visit. --BERNAMA

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