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M'SIA DISPROVES MYTH THAT SOUTH-SOUTH TRADE IMPOSSIBLE

By: Rachman Nordin

ACCRA (Ghana), Nov 9 (Bernama) -- Visiting Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, ever the strong advocate of greater South-South cooperation and self-reliance, today called on Ghana and other developing countries to disprove the notion that trade could not occur among them.

Citing figures to dispel such notion, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's exports to South countries rose from 12.2 per cent in 1990 to 16.5 per cent of total exports last year.

"The business community from our two countries should not be constrained by the myth that trade cannot occur and grow among developing countries like ours," he said.

Dr Mahathir, on the second day of a four-day visit to this former British colony in West Africa, was addressing about 200 prominent members of the Ghanaian and Malaysian business community over luncheon here.

Earlier, he opened an exhibition on Malaysian products and the Malaysian-owned International Commercial Bank (ICB) here. He later witnessed the handing over of the Tema Shipyard and Dry Dock Corporation to its Malaysian majority shareholder, the Business Focus Company.

Members of an 85-men business entourage led by Arab-Malaysian Group chairman, Tan Sri Azman Hashim which is accompanying the Prime Minister were among those present.

They represented the Malaysian banking, telecommunications, property development, mining, construction, energy and tourism sectors keen on investing directly in 53 projects being privatised or acquiring equity in 69 other enterprises open to foreign participation.

Dr Mahathir said today's meeting of businessmen from both countries should explore downstream manufacturing ventures using local minerals, timber and other agricultural products as well as emerging markets in West and Central Africa.

Ghana alone has a market size of 17.7 million people.

He urged Malaysian and Ghanaian businessmen to seek joint ventures to import and distribute Malaysian manufactured products in Ghana and neighbouring landlocked markets and similarly export these countries' products via Ghana.

Dr Mahathir said the present level of trade and narrow range of product traded did not reflect the true potential for Ghana-Malaysia bilateral trade.

"I strongly believe that there is a considerable scope for expansion for bilateral trade. Although presently small in relation to Malaysia's global trade, Malaysia-Ghana trade has been growing," he said.

From just about US\$700,000 five years ago, their bilateral trade grew on average by 60.3 per cent annually reaching US\$6.6 million last year. (US\$1 = RM2.5)

Malaysia's export to Ghana expanded by about 60 per cent each year during that period to reach US\$3.9 million in 1995.

Malaysia imported US\$2.7 million worth of products from Ghana last year, 35 per cent of which were raw materials.

Last night, speaking at a Ghana-Malaysia Business Council dinner in his honour, Dr Mahathir said he envisaged true South-South cooperation to come about when Ghanaian themselves invest in Malaysia.

Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings himself led one of the two visits by

Ghanaian businessmen to Kuala Lumpur last year where a workshop on investment opportunities in Ghana was held.

Ghana, which gained independence in 1957 from the British only five months earlier than Malaya, adopted an economic recovery programme in 1983 and started privatising state corporations in 1988. It is expected to achieve five per cent economic growth this year. -- BERNAMA

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