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Mahathir-Bosnia

MALAYSIA OFFERS EXPERIENCE IN COMMUNITY REBUILDING TO BOSNIA

By: Mokhtar Hussain

SARAJEVO, April 19 (Bernama) -- Malaysia, which subscribes to the ideals of a multi-ethnic society, is willing to share its experience in institutional and community rebuilding as part of its assistance in the reconstruction of the war-ravaged Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today institutional and community rebuilding could be a critical component in the process of recovery and economic development of the new Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation.

He said that Malaysia, which also has a federal system of government, subscribed to the same ideals of a multi-ethnic society as Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"We are also prepared to share our expertise and to train Bosnian technical staff and administrators in important skills in nation building, which may be in short supply in Bosnia-Herzegovina today," he said at the Bosnia-Herzegovina - Malaysia Business Meeting here.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and a delegation which include captains of 14 Malaysian companies was on a tour of three Balkan states to promote trade ties and reconstruction of the former war-torn Yugoslavia.

He began his visit in Zagreb, Croatia yesterday and is scheduled to leave for Skopje, Macedonia tomorrow before ending his tour.

The Prime Minister said that Malaysia could also impart its experience in privatisation, foreign investment legislation and economic development planning through the exchange of senior officials and their attachment to various agencies for training in Malaysia.

"Malaysia would like to go beyond symbolic gestures, and earnestly contribute to the rebuilding of Bosnia-Herzegovina in areas which are within our expertise and capability.

"It is our conviction that in addition to humanitarian assistance, we should focus on practical areas of social development that will immediately help alleviate the hardships of the people and lay groundwork for sustained economic recovery," he said.

He said that Malaysia would look into housing and the rehabilitation of industries in which it might have some expertise.

Dr Mahathir said it had been estimated that up to 65 per cent of the industrial capacity in Bosnia had been destroyed, resulting in shortages of basic necessities like food, clothing, medicine and construction materials.

In this respect, he urged the Malaysian private sector to explore the possibility of establishing depots in Bosnia-Herzegovina for the distribution of essential goods.

The Prime Minister also suggested that Malaysian business community participated in the rehabilitation of the manufacturing and mining sectors of Bosnia-Herzegovina which accounted for about 50 per cent of the GDP.

He said industries which had been identified by the Bosnia-Herzegovina government for rehabilitation were timber-based products, metal products, agro-industries, textiles, construction materials, shoes, chemicals, automobiles and carpets.

He reminded Malaysian companies experienced in handling privatised government agencies to take advantage should the Bosnian government turn to private companies for the reconstruction work.

"Given the scarcity of resources and the urgency of reconstruction, it

is inevitable that the task of reconstruction will eventually be private-sector led," he added.

Dr Mahathir also described relationship between the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Malaysia as a very special one.

"Although Malaysia may be far away we cannot help but be moved by the bravery of your people in the face of overwhelming odds, particularly as the world deprived you of your basic rights to defend yourself.

"While our common religion may be a factor, it is also the gross injustice that moved us. And so we have stretched out our hands of friendship for we understand the loneliness of days of trial.

"Now is the time for the reconstruction of your country and we would like to be of some help," he said.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir witnessed the signing ceremony between Energoinvest and Revolutionary Technology Holdings Sdn Bhd and another between Telekom Malaysia Berhad and Public Enterprise PTT of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Later Dr Mahathir was appointed as chairman of the Malaysia-Bosnia Herzegovina Business Council.

This council was formed on April 11 this year following an agreement signed between the President of the Chamber of Economy of Bosnia Herzegovina, Mensur Smajlovic and Chairman of the SAL Group Malaysia Abdul Rashid Abdul Ghani. --BERNAMA

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