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Mahathir-PNG

MALAYSIA WELCOMES PNG'S EFFORTS TO BE CLOSER TO SOUTHEAST ASIAN REGION

KUALA LUMPUR, April 2 (Bernama) -- Malaysia welcomes Papua New Guinea's efforts to bring the small island nations of the South Pacific closer to the Southeast Asian region, Asean in particular, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

Malaysia also trusted that it would bring benefits to both sides as the potential for cooperation between Southeast Asia and the South Pacific region was extremely good, he added.

Malaysia was encouraged by the positive response from Papua New Guinea and other island nations of the South Pacific, he said, noting that Papua New Guinea's "Look North" policy was a source of great encouragement.

"The best evidence of the cooperation is the estimated 3,000 Malaysians who now live and work in the South Pacific island nations, especially in Papua New Guinea," he said at a dinner he hosted in honour of the visiting Papua New Guinea Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chan, at Seri Perdana, here.

Sir Julius arrived yesterday for a six-day official visit, accompanied by his wife Lady Stella and a 60-member delegation of government officials and businessmen.

Dr Mahathir said the cooperation was a tangible manifestation of South-South cooperation and of the entrepreneurial spirit of the Malaysian corporate sector.

He added: "I am proud to note that, having been successful in economic activities related to timber resources, they have now diversified into other areas such as agriculture, infrastructure, housing and various manufacturing, retail and service industries.

"There seems to be much confidence and considerable scope for joint partnerships in other areas."

Dr Mahathir hoped the participation of Malaysian entrepreneurs in Papua New Guinea's development and the assistance offered under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme would be useful in meeting the requirements of the Papua New Guinea government.

What Malaysia could not provide by way of grants and loans would be made up with investments, sharing of expertise in certain fields and a willingness to work as equal partners, he said.

Dr Mahathir said he had asked the Malaysian private sector to go for long-term relationships and to abide by local customs, laws and practices.

"The success of these operations is important in encouraging more Malaysians with the know-how and capital to venture into even more areas and in a bigger way," he added.

He also said that Malaysia realised that what its entrepreneurs could do would be modest and could only supplement and complement the role of the Papua New Guinea government.

He added: "I am pleased that Malaysian companies currently provide employment to about 20,000 Papua New Guinea nationals.

"We believe that the joint ventures that we have already established will help broaden and deepen the scope of our relations."

Dr Mahathir was confident that with better understanding of each other, the challenges faced in the future would be easily overcome and the two countries could draw satisfaction from the numerous opportunities to consolidate the relationship further.

Chan suggested that Malaysia and Papua New Guinea formalise direct bilateral relations at the highest level.

He said with such direct relations, Papua New Guinea could cooperate directly with Malaysia in promoting closer relations between the two regional organisations of ASEAN and the South Pacific Forum.

"As the South Pacific Forum leader, Papua New Guinea has an obvious obligation to enhance the bilateral relations between the two regions," he said.

He said the the two organisations had their own strength that could be developed for the benefit of the Southeast Asian and South Pacific countries.

On the investment prospect in Papua New Guinea, Chan said that his government would provide the appropriate environment, infrastructure and create the necessary resources for foreign investment.

Chan said Papua New Guinea needed Malaysian investment, expertise and training aid for its development.

He said there were four areas -- forestry, agriculture, petroleum and gas, and mineral sectors -- that Malaysian could invest and have a good prospects.

"Papua New Guinea is looking forward to getting Kuala Lumpur's help because we regard Malaysia as a model worth emulating in development, he said.

He said he was impressed with Malaysia's determination in achieving Vision 2020.

"The entire process is the most challenging undertaken by any country in the world but Malaysia's progress is obvious," he added.

Also present at the dinner were Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Badawi and Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Kheng Yaik. -- BERNAMA

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