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Velayati

RAILWAY HERALDS NEW ERA IN IRAN'S ECONOMIC COOPERATION

KUALA LUMPUR, March 11 (Bernama) -- The newly completed Iran-Turkmenistan railway line will open a new chapter in Iran's economic cooperation with other countries, Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Ali Akbar Velayati said today.

He said the railway line between Mashhad in northeast Iran and Tadjikistan in Turkmenistan would link up Iran to the Central Asia railway network.

"It will start a new chapter of economic cooperation among the countries, between Iran and Central Asia and friendly countries like Malaysia, India and Pakistan," he told reporters after calling on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Prime Minister's Department here.

He delivered to Dr Mahathir a special invitation from Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Turkmenistan President Saparmurad Niyazov to attend the official opening of the 130km railway line in May.

With the completion of the RM125 million line, Iran's railway system now runs the length of the country, starting from Abbas Port in the southern tip, and across the border to Tadjikistan, where the Central Asia railway network is connected to. The line from Abbas Port to Tadjikistan is 2,620km.

Velayati said the new railway link would provide easy access for other countries, specifically Asean countries, to Central Asia to sell and buy commodities.

"This is a good facility for all of us, for the future and regional cooperation among different countries," he said.

Velayati and Dr Mahathir also discussed cooperation on bilateral, regional and international issues.

Velayati said he had suggested that this May's Iran-Malaysia joint economic commission session be held in Tehran.

"I have reported to Dr Mahathir that during the first nine months of 1995, we have had a 30 percent increase in the bilateral transaction between Iran and Malaysia. This is a good progress in economic ties between Iran and Malaysia," he said.

They also exchanged views on Bosnia.

Earlier, Velayati called on Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at Wisma Putra.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Abdullah said the railway link afforded Malaysia an opportunity to use Iran as a gateway to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Malaysia could now intensify import-export activities with the CIS via the Abbas Port at the Persian Gulf, he said.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir had during his previous visit to Iran suggested that it establish a land transport network with the CIS which did not have a port.

"With the establishment of the link from Mashhad to Tadjikistan, Dr Mahathir's wish has become a reality to enable Malaysia to make Abbas Port its gateway to CIS," he said.

Malaysia viewed this as a significant development in line with its role as the coordinator of the proposed railway network from Singapore to China and the Trans-Europe railway link, he said. -- Bernama

AFY ARA YBY