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#### A confidence-building step

THERE is no doubt that members of the visiting high-powered Bosnia-Herzegovina delegation will take home with them an invaluable insight into the Malaysian experience in forging a successful nation. From the positive statements of the co-chairmen of the Council of Ministers, Dr Haris Silajdzic and Boro Bosic, they are clearly impressed. Silajdzic, no stranger to this country, for example, spoke of the Bosnian war "having raised a question on breaking down cultural barriers of which the answer existed in this part of the world".

He is, however, not the first to express this conviction. Richard Holbrooke, the United States' architect of the Dayton Accord which ended the Balkan war two years ago, during a visit here last October, stressed that Bosnia should learn from Malaysia that the Muslims, Croats and Serbs of the region "must live and work together in harmony to make economic progress".

It is an understatement to say that the path for Bosnia to full co-operation and peace as a single country has not been easy. Holbrooke has this month to come out of self-imposed "retirement" from the diplomatic service for the second time in a year to salvage key aspects of the peace treaty.

The message that the Bosnians have to help themselves to earn the confidence of the world community, including Malaysia, to aid them in the massive task of economic reconstruction has been driven home this week by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his meetings with the Bosnian leaders. He stressed the need for the "fragile peace" to be nurtured to become a genuine and durable one.

In Malaysia, the Bosnians could not find a more sincere friend in need. Having been a staunch supporter of peace, Malaysia has been just as forthcoming in helping in the crucial task of reconstructing the war-torn country which is estimated to cost RM10 billion. Assuring the Bosnian leaders of Malaysia's commitment to help, Dr Mahathir said Kuala Lumpur wants to develop a genuine partnership with their country. Malaysia has pledged RM36 million for the reconstruction programme and would like to see more active participation by the private sectors of the two countries not only in those projects identified by Malaysia but also in other projects, including those funded by others.

The announcement on Tuesday that 12 Malaysian companies, including one which is listed, have formed a consortium to spearhead efforts to invest and take part in the reconstruction process speaks a lot for the Malaysian genuineness in aiding that country back on its feet. Though small in terms of the huge sum required to achieve the goal, it is both a caring gesture and a show of confidence that the Bosnians can make it given the will and perseverance. Last week's forum which afforded an opportunity for Malaysian entrepreneurs to meet some 36 Bosnian companies' representatives should be useful to enable the Malaysians to better understand the Bosnian economic potential.

Given the fruitful outcome of this first joint visit by the Bosnian leaders at the invitation of Dr Mahathir plus the assurance by Silajdzic that the parties are working together for integration, these constitute a significant confidence-boosting step. It certainly augurs well for the Balkan State to get more assistance and co-operation from the rest of the world community for its vital reconstruction and development.

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