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Mahathir-China

M'SIA SEEKS TO INCREASE EXPORTS TO CHINA, SAY MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight Malaysia looks forward to being accorded continued opportunities to increase exports, especially of manufactured and semi-finished products, to China.

Malaysia was hopeful of such opportunities as China liberalised its trade further, he said, expressing optimism that Sino-Malaysia trade and economic ties would expand following the excellent performance of China's economy.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a dinner at his official residence, Sri Perdana, in honour of his Chinese counterpart Li Peng.

Present were Dr Mahathir's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali and Li's wife, Zhu Lin.

Li Peng arrived today with a 117-member entourage for a four-day official visit.

Dr Mahathir said Sino-Malaysian diplomatic and political ties moved in tandem with their rapidly growing bilateral economic ties.

He said trade between Malaysia and China reached RM9.45 billion last year compared with RM1.2 billion in 1995.

Dr Mahathir also spoke of enhanced ties in the educational field and said Malaysia welcomed the setting up of a Malay Studies centre at the Beijing University of Foreign Studies.

"It is our hope that Chinese students intending to further their studies in Malaysia will equip themselves with basic knowledge of Bahasa Melayu at the centre before coming to Malaysia," he said.

On Sino-Asean relations, Dr Mahathir said, the creation of dialogue channels marked a new era in cooperation between the republic and the regional grouping.

Since last year China has been a full dialogue partner of Asean, the nine-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations comprising Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

"Asean and China have a key role in bringing about greater peace, stability and prosperity to the region," he said.

In this context, Malaysia welcomed Chinese president Jiang Zemin's participation in the Asean informal summit to be held here in December, Dr Mahathir said.

China's support for Asean's call for exchange of views among East Asian countries on regional peace, stability and economic growth, was much appreciated, he said.

Dr Mahathir expressed appreciation for China's active participation in projects under the Asean-Mekong Basin Development Cooperation (AMBDC).

He was confident that with China's support, the objectives of the AMBDC could be achieved.

On Cambodia, Dr Mahathir said Asean welcomed China's contribution to the joint pursuit of a peaceful settlement to the conflict there.

On problems pertaining to the Korean peninsula, Dr Mahathir said China's role in the four-nation (China, the United States, North Korea and South Korea) peace talks would lead to a permanent settlement.

"We in Malaysia are prepared to contribute in whatever way we can to bring about lasting peace in the Korean peninsula," he said.

He said Malaysia was not being apathetic to the plight of the

famine-stricken people of North Korea at a time when they needed food and other basic relief for survival.

Dr Mahathir congratulated China on the peaceful reclamation of her sovereignty over the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong last month.

He expressed confidence that Malaysia-Hong Kong relations would contribute to the Sino-Malaysia ties overall.

Li, in his reply, expressed appreciation and admiration for Malaysia's active and vocal role in regional and international affairs.

"It has upheld justice in international affairs in defiance of might and worked for the common development of third world countries, for which we wish to express our appreciation and admiration," he said.

With concerted efforts, China and Malaysia could experience new and greater development of their friendly relations and cooperation, he said.

On Asean, Li said, China would like to make further efforts together with Asean countries to develop a 21st century-oriented friendly and good-neighbourly relationship.

"China and Asean are engaged in fruitful, all-round cooperation with each other," he added. -- BERNAMA

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