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Establish air links to boost ties with Hungary: Dr M

Kamarul Yunus in Budapest

BUDAPEST, Wed: Malaysia is keen to establish air links between Kuala Lumpur and Budapest to boost bilateral relations in trade and tourism, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Speaking to Malaysian journalists at the end of his two-day visit here yesterday, Dr Mahathir said airlines in Malaysia should work with the Hungarian airline authorities and airline company to discuss the viability of an air service between the two capital cities.

Asked whether the local airlines should form a joint-venture or code-share arrangement with Malev, the Hungarian national carrier, Dr Mahathir said interested Malaysian airlines, probably Malaysia Airlines or AirAsia, should decide on such proposed air service.

"It is up to our airline companies which are interested to forge such an air link, whether to form a code-share arrangement or a joint-venture or even acquire a stake in Malev.

"There are many forms of cooperation but the Malaysian airlines should conduct a feasibility study first on the proposed air service," he added.

He said airlines in Malaysia can tap the opportunities of such cooperation in the aviation industry in view of the sizeable presence of Hungarians in Australia.

"There are some possibilities for Malaysian investors investing in the hotel industry and probably (flying) passengers from Kuala Lumpur to Budapest and vice versa.

"I believe that there are many Hungarians in Australia and this will create an opportunity for us to provide such an air service to Budapest to ferry the Hungarian passengers in Australia," he said.

Asked on his visit, Dr Mahathir said he was satisfied with the trip. Hungary, he said, provides numerous economic, investment and business opportunities.

"For instance, Hungary serves as a gateway for Malaysian businessmen to penetrate the Balkan markets such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina," he said, adding that Hungary is keen also to cooperate with Malaysian companies in redeveloping the war-torn Balkan state.

He said the Hungarians are offering expertise and engineers that may be needed by the Malaysian companies to participate in the reconstruction of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"Since Malaysia is facing shortage of manpower, we can forge cooperation with Hungarian companies to assist in carrying out development projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina," he added.

In the science and technology field, Dr Mahathir said the signing of the memorandum of understanding between Multimedia Development Corp (MDC) and Infopark RT Budapest will enable both parties to identify the scope of cooperation in developing the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and Hungary's Infopark.

"The authorities concerned will carry out a study on the areas of cooperation to develop the MSC and Infopark," he added.

MDC and Infopark signed the MOU on Monday that will pave the way for a link-up between MSC and Infopark as well as with other technology hubs in Asia, Europe and the US.

Dr Mahathir said since his last visit to Hungary in 1987, the country has undergone rapid changes.

"At that time, there was hardly any business going-on and almost no cars

on the road as well as its citizens seem unemployed. Now, I find that Budapest has experienced various changes and growing like any other major cities in Europe, with the presence of modern shops, cafes and many cars," he added.

His visit reciprocated the visit to Malaysia by Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Horn in April.

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