

08 SEP 1997

Mahathir- Mongolia

KL SUPPORTS MONGOLIA'S DESIRE TO IMPROVE TIES WITH ASIA PACIFIC

By: Zulkefli Salleh

ULAN BATOR (Mongolia), Sept 8 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight expressed support for Mongolia's desire to step up ties with countries in the Asia Pacific region including Southeast Asia, saying it guarantees peace and stability in the region.

The Prime Minister said that with the rapid economic growth in Asia Pacific, the region was not only an important market for Mongolian goods but also a source of investment for that country.

"Over and above the economic benefits, close relations between countries in the Asia Pacific region, irrespective of whether they are big or small, rich or poor, is about the only real guarantee of peace and stability in this region," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here this evening for a four-day official visit, was speaking at a dinner reception hosted by Mongolian Prime Minister M. Enkhsaikhan at the Government House.

Dr Mahathir is accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, and his entourage includes seven cabinet ministers and a chief minister, as well as a 65-member business delegation.

He said any attempt to isolate or prevent any nation from playing its legitimate role in regional political and economic matters was tantamount to sowing the seeds of dissatisfaction and instability.

However, he said he was confident that Mongolia's desire for better ties would be well received by countries in the Asia Pacific region.

Dr Mahathir, who is on his first visit to Mongolia, said he was happy that the country had achieved high economic progress within a short span of time after implementing economic and political reforms.

This is proof of the ability and desire of the people of Mongolia to overcome various challenges faced by them, he said.

"This reminds me of the major success achieved during Mongolia's glorious era under the rule of Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan who managed to overcome all obstacles and leave behind something that cannot be forgotten in the history of mankind," he said.

Dr Mahathir said bilateral ties between Malaysia and Mongolia, which established diplomatic relations 26 years ago, entered a new phase in July 1995 following the visit to Malaysia by the then Mongolian prime minister, Putsagiin Jasrai.

Expressing the hope that his current visit would help to strengthen ties, Dr Mahathir said he was looking forward to bilateral discussions here tomorrow.

Malaysia and Mongolia are expected to sign tomorrow an air service agreement, umbrella agreement for economic cooperation, and also agreements in the scientific, education, technical and cultural fields.

Dr Mahathir hoped that the private sector of both countries would also step up cooperation in trade and investment.

He said Malaysian businessmen were encouraged to seek business opportunities in the tourism, transport, telecommunications, mining, housing and infrastructure construction sectors.

He was happy that some Malaysian companies had invested in Malaysia and hoped more would do so after this.

Enkhsaikhan, in his speech, expressed Mongolia's hope to develop closer relations and cooperation with Asia Pacific countries as part of its multi-pillar foreign policy.

"We believe that at the end of the "cold war" era, Asean makes an important contribution to the strengthening of stability and the promotion of economy cooperation in the Asia Pacific region," he said.

The Mongolian leader said the country was grateful to Malaysia for its understanding and positive attitude towards its desire to join Apec and to participate in the Asean Regional Forum. -- BERNAMA

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