

03 MAR 1997

Croatia-Trade

MALAYSIA-CROATIA BILATERAL TRADE STILL LESS THAN EXPECTED

KUALA LUMPUR, March 3 (Bernama) -- The bilateral trade between Malaysia and Croatia is currently at more lower level than are possible, Croatian Prime Minister Zlatko Matesa said tonight.

He said Croatia hoped to develop the partnership even further.

"Now we can focus on the enhancement of our bilateral relations which, after establishing our respective diplomatic missions, are broadening on all levels," he said at an official dinner hosted in his honour by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Sri Perdana, here.

Matesa said he believed his four-day official visit here would give strong incentive to bilateral economic cooperation particularly in shipbuilding, construction, electronics and car industry.

He asked Dr Mahathir to further encourage Malaysian businessmen to invest in Croatia which has at its disposal educated and skilled manpower as well as traditionally being good relations with European market.

Matesa also emphasised on the possibilities of mutual participation in the re-construction of Bosnia as well as the utilisation of Croatia as the base for Malaysia's penetration to Central and Eastern Europe.

"Malaysia is indeed of greatest interest to Croatia not only as a political and regional leader but a potentially great partner ... and also our main entrance gate to Asia," he said.

Admiring the harmony among the different races and religions in Malaysia, he said Croatia could learn from Malaysia's experience in time when of deepening bilateral relations with neighbouring states.

"When Croatia is fully capable of resolving questions about its future by itself and with confidence ... we will continue to contribute to international security and prosperity as a respected international factor," he said.

The visiting Croatian Prime Minister also commended valuable contribution made by Malaysian police and military forces in achieving overall peace in the region.

Croatia, which is in the sixth year of independence, has a growth of between seven and eight per cent last year with budget deficit less than one per cent, inflation rate of about three per cent and foreign debt less than 25 per cent of the Gross Domestic Products. -- BERNAMA

JM ABG