

02 MAY 1997

Mahathir-Muluzi

MALAYSIA-MALAWI COOPERATION CAN BE EXTENDED, SAYS MAHATHIR

BLANTYRE (MALAWI), May 3 (Bernama) -- Southern Africa, including the Republic of Malawi, is set to regain its position as an important trading and commercial place in Africa as the region frees itself from confrontation and conflicts, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The prime minister said Malaysia believed that as the leaders of the region rededicated themselves to the aims and ideals of regional cooperation, southern Africa would regain its position as a major trading area.

"We are glad that the days of confrontation and conflict are largely over in the southern African region and that the countries in the region are moving towards closer cooperation through the Southern African Development Community (SADC)," he said at a state banquet hosted by Malawian President Dr Bakili Muluzi, here, last night.

Dr Mahathir arrived here yesterday Thursday for a three-day official visit. He is accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, and a business delegation led by Arab-Malaysia Group chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim.

Also in the entourage are Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie and senior government officials.

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that with the stable political and economic environment prevailing in the southern African region, the kind of cooperation that Malaysia and Malawi had established could be extended to include not only different countries but the entire Southeast Asian and southern African region.

On relations with Malawi, the prime minister said the strong bonds that were forged as a result of the exchange of bilateral visits were there to stay.

"There is optimism in both our countries that we will be able to realise collaboration in matters relating to socio-economic development, education, agriculture and in other fields," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the joint venture between Telekom Malaysia Berhad and the Malawi Post and Telecommunication Corporation had been a source of encouragement for further collaboration.

"These joint ventures can be largely realised through good networking between the private sectors of our countries," he said, adding that a little encouragement from the government was essential.

The prime minister said that on the government-to-government level, Malaysia had sought through various mechanisms to impart some of its knowledge, expertise and technology to other countries of the South.

He said that since 1990, a total of 42 Malawians have visited Malaysia under some of these programmes.

Covering an area of nearly 119,000 square km, Malawi, a landlocked country with a population of nearly 11 million, shares a boundary with Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. Malawi's annual Gross Domestic Product is US\$180 (RM450).

Malaysia's total trade with Malawi in 1996 stood at RM2.55 million (US\$1.02 million), an increase of 36.4 per cent from RM1.87 million (US\$0.75 million) in 1995.

Exports to Malawi amounted to RM1.13 million (US\$0.45 million) and imports amounted to RM1.42 million (US\$0.57 million). Malaysia's trade deficit with Malawi was RM0.29 million (US\$0.12 million).

In 1996, Malaysia's exports were valued at RM1.13 million (US\$0.45 million), a decrease of 15 per cent from RM1.33 million (US\$0.53 million) in 1995. The main export items were palm stearin which accounted for 47.8 per cent of the total exports followed by electrical apparatus, resistors and other electrical bases; parts and accessories for office machines; radio broadcast receivers and rubber tyres, tyre flaps and inner tubes for wheels.

Malaysia's imports from Malawi in 1996 were valued at RM1.42 million (US\$0.57 million), an increase of 162.9 per cent from 1995.

This was due to the increase in the imports of dhall. Dhall remains the single largest product imported from Malawi which accounted for 93.7 per cent of the total imports in 1996. -- BERNAMA

ES JK