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Mahathir-Hungary

MALAYSIA AND HUNGARY CAN HELP BALKAN STATES, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Wan A. Hulaimi

BUDAPEST, June 24 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's position as the gateway to Southeast Asia and Hungary's position of similar advantage to the Balkan states will help contribute towards a cooperation for mutual benefit, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here Monday.

Hungary's desire to export and participate in the economic development in Southeast Asia could be done through Malaysia as a gateway to the region, he told a joint news conference with his Hungarian counterpart, Gyula Horn, after their 90-minute talks.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a two-month leave, arrived here earlier in the day from London for a two-day working visit.

Hungary, a country with skilled manpower resource but suffering a high rate of inflation and unemployment, is seeking to strengthen its economy through strategic alliances with countries such as Malaysia and tapping on the emerging markets of Southeast Asia.

Conversely, Malaysia's plan to participate in the reconstruction programme of Bosnia-Herzegovina could be well served through joint ventures with Hungary which provides a strategic gateway to the Balkans as well as skilled manpower and technological expertise.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had been offered many projects in Bosnia, particularly in airport construction, communications and transportation.

He said Malaysia had not concluded contracts on the Bosnian opportunities but he felt that there was scope for Malaysia to work with Hungary because of its proximity and its knowledge of the region as well as skilled manpower.

"At the moment the financing of these projects is being looked into," he said.

Soon after the plenary meeting and immediately before the press conference Dr Mahathir witnessed the signing of a memorandum of intent for mutual cooperation between Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and Interpark, Hungary's own information technology programme.

"I hope that this will interest a lot of companies involved in multimedia and also help cooperation between our two countries in this rapidly expanding field for the future," Dr Mahathir said.

The number of Nobel Prize winners of Hungarian origin in the fields of chemistry, physiology and medicine and physics since 1905 is high in comparison with the size of the nation which now has a population of just over 10 million.

Today, Malaysia looks at the highly skilled scientists and manpower resources that Hungary has to offer for mutually beneficial joint-venture programmes and technology-sharing ventures in infrastructure construction as well as in the field of information technology development.

On the MSC project Dr Mahathir said: "Although there are many other countries which have plans for the information age, Malaysia's plan is the broadest and the most comprehensive of all."

When asked about Hungary's request for Malaysian assistance in its privatisation programme, he said: "We are very familiar with privatisation in Malaysia. We have privatised more than 400 government entities successfully. We are looking especially into transportation, including air transportation (in Hungary). We are also looking into navigation in rivers."

As the final programme of the day before reconvening for dinner hosted

by Horn, Dr Mahathir stopped at the East-West Trade Centre building to officially open the local branch of the Malaysian-owned International Commercial Bank.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding, who earlier held meetings with Hungarian scientists here on potential areas of cooperation, spoke to Malaysian journalists after the news conference.

He said a joint commission on science and technology had been set up to work on this cooperation.

He said that of all the science and technology agreements signed by his ministry, the one with Hungary (signed during the Hungarian Prime Minister's visit to Malaysia in April) had the fastest implementation time.

An area for cooperation immediately identified was joint research in pharmaceuticals where he observed that both sides had shown very keen interest.

Hungarian scientists will visit Malaysia in October for further discussions on this new agreement for scientific and technological cooperation.

Dr.Mahathir's mission to explain the MSC will continue Tuesday when he addresses a 500-strong Hungarian business delegation at Parliament house after meeting the speaker of the National Assembly, Zoltan Gal.

Dr Mahahir and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali will return to London the same afternoon. -- BERNAMA

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