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Malaysia calls on Bosnia rivals to abide by peace accord

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Malaysia, which has strong investment interests in Bosnia-Herzegovina, has called on the three rival ethnic groups in the Balkan state to adhere to the Dayton peace accord in order to ensure permanent peace and political stability.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said peace and stability would make it easier for the country to receive assistance from the international community including Malaysia.

He said Malaysia was keen to help Bosnia-Herzegovina rebuild the country but strife between Muslims, Serbs and Croats had raised doubts among Malaysian companies planning to invest there.

Dr Mahathir conveyed this to the co-chairmen of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Boro Bosic and Haris Siladjic, at a meeting at the Prime Minister's Department today.

They arrived yesterday for a five-day official visit on the invitation of Dr Mahathir.

Briefing reporters on the meeting, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Malaysia also stressed that it was important for the Bosnia-Herzegovina Government to protect the interests of investors.

"They concurred with Dr Mahathir's views that to attract more investment, the Government has to build up the confidence of investors. Only then will they start to put in their money and stay."

Abdullah said Malaysia was willing to help in developing the economy of the country from the socialist system practised under the Soviet Union era to an open market system.

"We are willing to conduct workshops and training for their people, including those in the private sector. With the experience gained from helping Vietnam open up its economy, Malaysia feels that the lessons can also be used in Bosnia."

Abdullah said Bosic and Siladjic agreed that Bosnia could learn much from Malaysia especially in the area of power-sharing among the various races and its development programmes.

"Dr Mahathir says Malaysia welcomes party leaders, government officials and community leaders who would like to come to Malaysia and see for themselves the real situation here."

Later, Foreign Ministry Under Secretary M. Santhanaban said the main worries of foreign investors in Bosnia-Herzegovina were its bureaucratic woes and limited exposure to the open economy system.

"Besides, Malaysian companies are reluctant to go there because certain government institutions are still not operational."

On whether the Malaysian Government would encourage companies to invest there, he said: "The Government prefers them to do so as stability is expected to prevail. In the long run, there are plenty of prospects."

On the trade volume, Santhanaban said the amount was small and now stood at about RM4 million.

He said Malaysia had committed US\$12 million (over RM30 million) for bilateral programmes and projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which would also see the participation of the Malaysian private sector.

He added several projects had been identified and were expected to take off soon.

These were related to health, education, agriculture and projects aimed at creating jobs for the Bosnians.

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