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Mahathir-dinner

MALAYSIA CALLS FOR DIRECT SHIPPING LINKS WITH CHILE

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

SANTIAGO, Sept 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called for the establishment of direct shipping links between Malaysia and Chile to facilitate increased trade.

He urged the business communities of the two countries to seriously consider the project to complement the direct air links which are to be established next year.

Saying that greater windows of opportunity in tourism and trade would be made available with the linkages, Dr Mahathir noted that in 1991 when he first visited Santiago there was simply no awareness among Malaysian businessmen as to what Chile had to offer.

Today Malaysian businessmen have investments here and there are more than 1,000 Proton cars on Chilean streets, capturing four per cent of the market.

"Distance and language are no longer cited as obstacles to trade and investment in Chile," Dr Mahathir in his speech at an official dinner hosted by President Eduardo Frei.

Chile, a resource-rich Spanish speaking nation of 14 million, occupies 750,000 sq km of the Western coastal strip of South America and is the furthest country for Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir told his audience that Malaysia has also begun to make its own electrical products under the brand name MEC and was studying the possibility of setting up a distribution centre in Chile.

For Chilean businessmen wanting to tap the Asean market, the Prime Minister offered Malaysia as the base of their operations.

He also invited Chilean telecommunications companies to participate in the Multi-Media Super Corridor (MSC) project.

Dr Mahathir, a strong advocate of South-South cooperation, said developing countries like Malaysia and Chile must stand together to determine their own destiny.

He said that in the post cold war world, there was a tendency for the powerful to dictate the way the weak should govern themselves.

Developing countries were made to serve the vested interests of those more powerful, as evidenced in South East Asia where currency speculation by rogue manipulators brought disastrous consequences to the economies of countries in the region.

The Prime Minister said the rich defended their actions by maintaining that what happened was nothing more than a reaction to market forces and would come to pass.

"But we the developing countries are the ones who have to live with the consequences of such irresponsible actions," he said. -- BERNAMA

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