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Mahathir-trade

MALAYSIA PROPOSES WAYS TO OFFSET TRADE IMBALANCE

ISLAMABAD, April 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia has put forward proposals to Pakistan to help offset trade imbalance between the two countries.

They include identifying products that Malaysia could buy from Pakistan and perhaps help in processing them for exports purposes.

"This way can also help Pakistan earn foreign exchange," he told a news conference at the Chaklala Air Force base here before returning home after a short visit to Pakistan yesterday.

Dr Mahathir, who held talks with his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif at his residence here, said both countries could also discuss ways for Malaysian companies to help reduce Pakistan's imports by producing them within Pakistan itself.

The prime minister, accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, was earlier on a six-day official to Kuwait and Bahrain to enhance bi-lateral ties.

Dr Mahathir said he and Nawaz also discussed privatisation, down-sizing government agencies and reduction of government deficit, among other things.

He said Malaysian companies have already ventured into Pakistan looking at areas like oil and gas exploration, building of pipelines, power generation and food processing export.

Replying to questions, Dr Mahathir said while Malaysia was moving towards industrialisation, she would not neglect her commitment to help poorer countries.

"We have a policy of trying to help poor countries because we want to see them become rich, when they become rich they can buy our palm oil," he said when asked whether Malaysia would ignore to help less-developed countries like Pakistan as she moved towards being an industrialised nation.

He said Malaysia would also support Pakistan's future participation in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

The prime minister also responded to questions on corruption, stability and palm oil.

On corruption, he said it was not something that Malaysia had completely succeeded in eradicating but her independent anti-corruption agency investigates allegation of corruption against anyone, including chief ministers and government officers.

"Currently one chief minister is being investigated by the agency and a number of other government officers. They are all under investigation if there is any report of corruption," he said.

On political stability, Dr Mahathir said this was important for a country's development and urged Pakistanis to give Nawaz a chance to administer the country at least for a full term and only make an assessment on him at the end of his tenure.

Dr Mahathir was asked for his opinion on Nawaz's administration and dream of transforming Pakistan into an economic tiger nation.

"I believe he is able to produce results. He keeps on talking of developing Pakistan and using Malaysia as a model. He has his heart in seeing this country develops. Nobody can develop a country if he is given two or three years to govern," he said.

Dr Mahathir also spoke of his support for Pakistan and India holding a

dialogue to overcome problems.

"Malaysia believes Pakistan and India should have a dialogue and try to resolve problems between neighbours. Malaysia does not believe in confrontation and Malaysia has made clear her stand on this matter," he said.

On whether Malaysia would accept Pakistani workers, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was happy to have Pakistani professionals like medical officers and engineers but not unskilled workers as there was already an excess of them in Malaysia.

On Malaysia helping Pakistan to cultivate oil palm, Dr Mahathir said some countries had asked her to supply oil palm seeds but many had not done very well.

He said the highest oil palm yield are in areas within five degrees from the equator.

"I think we can think of other ways of overcoming these problems," he said.

Last year alone, Pakistan imported about 1.16 million tonnes of Malaysian palm oil or 84.9 per cent of Malaysia's total export to Pakistan.

-- BERNAMA

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