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Malaysia, Indonesia to build bridge across straits

ISTANBUL, Sun: Malaysia and Indonesia have agreed in principle to build a bridge from the peninsula to Sumatra as a way to accelerate economic cooperation.

In his bilateral talks with President Suharto here early today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told journalists that somehow, the project needs a careful study.

"The meeting (with Suharto) was to discuss means to improve bilateral relations between the two countries, which include a plan to build a bridge from the peninsula to Sumatra (in Indonesia).

"But we need to conduct a feasibility study first," he said.

On Malaysia's investments in Indonesia, Dr Mahathir said although the amount is not substantial, "we do understand the whole situation in Indonesia, and we have taken the matter into account."

Both leaders were among eight heads of government/state who attended the 13-15 inaugural summit meeting of the Developig Eight (D-8).

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told Malaysian journalists after the conclusion of the summit meeting that apart from holding talks with Suharto, the Prime Minister yesterday held bilateral meeting with Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

"They discussed bilateral issues relating to investment and trade which are relatively small compared to both countries' bilateral economic relations with other nations.

"Somehow, they were confident that such relations can be further enhanced through various efforts," he said, adding that both governments had also agreed to revive to Malaysian projects in Iran.

The projects are in telecommunications and hotel construction, which Rafsanjani hoped could be carried out soon.

On the converse, Iran has offered Malaysia to utilise its train services to ferry goods from Bandar Abbas to Turkmenistan, which will also be of benefit to Iran.

"Rafsanjani also offered Malaysia to build its transit goods depot in Iran to facilitate its shipment to other West Asiab destinations," he said.

Other viable projects are in petroleum and gas sectors.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir told his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina Wajed that Malaysia will not be relying on foreign workers forever as it is developing a more advanced industry which is more capital-intensive.

"The Prime Minister has somehow told Hasina that Malaysian investors could look into the possibility of investing in the sunset industry in Bangladesh, which requires many workers.

"In welcoming the idea, Hasina hoped Malaysia will continue accept Bangladeshis seeking job in the country as Bangladesh is currently plagued with high rate of unemployment," Abdullah said.

In their bilateral meeting yesterday, Hasina also thanked the Malaysian Government for assisting its citizens there.

On the D-8 meeting, the Foreign Minister said it was done in a "business manner" as it took only about three hours to finish, and this reflects the maturity of the leaders who were committed to making the grouping as an economic forum.

He said there was a general aspiration for the grouping to become successful in dealing with bilateral trade, investment and other economic-

related issues among its members, and between the group and other economic groupings.

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