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Mahathir-Pakistan

M'SIA-PAKISTAN CAN DEMONSTRATE THAT MUSLIMS CAN COOPERATE

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 1 (Bernama) -- The introduction of a comprehensive reform package by Pakistan will hopefully open up more opportunities to Malaysian businessmen and investors to participate in that country's development projects, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

The prime minister hoped that the new policies would open up opportunities for Malaysians, especially in sectors such as housing, infrastructure, construction, aviation, banking and finance.

"The Malaysian private sector, with its experience in Africa, Europe, Latin America, South East Asia and other parts of the world, could join hands with their counterparts from Pakistan and make a significant contribution towards further enhancing Malaysia-Pakistan relations.

"The relocation of labour intensive industries to Pakistan on a joint-venture basis could also contribute towards reducing our trade imbalance while creating employment opportunities in Pakistan itself," he said at a dinner in honour of visiting Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at Sri Perdana, here.

Dr Mahathir said bilateral trade between the two countries stood at US\$698 million (RM1.74 billion) in 1996, out of which Malaysian exports amounted to US\$649 million (RM1.62 billion).

The prime minister said although the trade imbalance had widened over the years, he strongly believed that the gap could be narrowed.

"In this regard, I welcome your business delegation and wish them success in their meetings and discussions with their Malaysian counterparts," he said, adding that with their experience and expertise, the partnership between the private sectors would produce mutually beneficial results.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia and Pakistan could also cooperate to seek opportunities in Third Countries, especially the newly-independent Central Asian Republics where market potential existed.

"The time has come for us to demonstrate to the world that the Muslim Ummah can cooperate for its betterment and for the good of the world at large," he added.

He was happy that at the level of governmental cooperation, the first Ministerial Level Joint Commission Meeting had just concluded and he would urge both sides to take action to implement the decisions of the meeting.

Touching on the Kashmir issue, Dr Mahathir said he sincerely hoped that the recently concluded second round of talks between Pakistan and India in Islamabad would chart a friendly and harmonious relationship between the two neighbouring countries.

"I sincerely hope that the talks would provide a positive avenue in the pursuit of peace and stability in the sub-continent over the Kashmir issue," he said.

He said that in a dispute like that, no side could expect to get everything that it demanded or believed it had a right to, if there was to be any solution at all.

On Afghanistan, he said Malaysia supported any effort to bring the warring factions together in a political compact that would enable a sustained and lasting peace to be achieved in the country.

Dr Mahathir said the visit by Nawaz and his entourage marked an important milestone in enhancing the existing cordial and brotherly relations between Malaysia and Pakistan. -- BERNAMA

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