

02/08/1997

## Pakistan seeks full Asean dialogue partner status

Kamarul Yunus

PAKISTAN is seeking Malaysia's support to enable it to achieve full dialogue partner status with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) as well as to participate in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) and Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem).

This was conveyed by Pakistan Premier Nawaz Sharif to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during a delegation meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, briefing reporters after the two-hour meeting, said Malaysia will have to consult the other members in the grouping before full Asean dialogue partner status can be accorded to Pakistan.

However, he said Malaysia is confident that Pakistan, currently Asean's sectoral dialogue partner, will be given full partner status when the time is right.

"Currently, only Pakistan has been accorded the Asean sectoral dialogue partner. They will one day be a full dialogue partner like India, which had graduated from the sectoral dialogue partner," he added.

Nawaz is on a four-day official visit to Malaysia, his first since being elected as the premier after Pakistan's general election in February this year.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir welcomed Pakistan's role as an Asean sectoral dialogue partner, describing it as similar to the role played by other Asean full dialogue partners.

The only difference, he said, is that the cooperation between Pakistan and Asean countries is limited to certain sectors, in this case, trade and economy.

As an Asean sectoral dialogue partner, Abdullah said Pakistan still benefits, especially when the cooperation is specifically focused on trade and economy.

On Apec and Asem, Abdullah acknowledged that application to become a member will have to be discussed among the respective groupings' member countries.

Pakistan, which is not located within the Asia Pacific region, is very interested to participate in discussions with Apec countries.

It also wants to participate in the Asem, as much as other countries such as India, Australia and New Zealand. However, Asem is currently confined to Asean nations; the three East Asian countries of China, Japan and South Korea; and European countries.

On the delegation meeting, Abdullah said Malaysia is offering its expertise to assist Pakistan with its privatization programmes.

"Nawaz said Pakistan is keen to learn from us how to implement privatization programmes because Malaysia has long-standing experience in this field and has shown remarkable success in implementing the privatized projects."

Abdullah also said Dr Mahathir had briefed Nawaz on the Malaysia Inc concept, a collaboration between the Government and the private sector.

He said both prime ministers agreed to extend cooperation in various fields such as science and technology, education and defence.

Dr Mahathir and Nawaz witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Governments on defence cooperation.

The Defence Ministry's secretary-general Datuk Azizan Husain signed the

agreement on behalf of the Malaysian Government, while Pakistan was represented by its Secretary of Defence Lt Jen (B) Iftikhar Ali Khan.

The two prime ministers also witnessed the signing of an agreement to develop a RM104 million Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in Lahore, Pakistan.

(END)