

03/05/1997

PM: Cooperation can be extended to region

Hardev Kaur in Blantyre (Malawi)

BLANTYRE (Malawi), Fri: The meaningful cooperation between Malaysia and Malawi can be extended to include the "entire South-East Asian and Southern African region".

With the "days of confrontation and conflict largely over", countries in the Southern African region are moving towards closer cooperation through their membership and participation in the Southern Development Community (SADC).

And as leaders of the region rededicate themselves to the aims and ideals of regional cooperation, Southern Africa will regain its position as an important trading and commercial region in Africa.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed confidence that with the stable political and economic environment prevailing in the Southern African region, the cooperation that has been developed between Malaysia and Malawi can be extended to the whole of the Southern African region.

The SADC groups Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

In his address at the official banquet here, the Prime Minister said the close bonds of friendship developed following bilateral visits "are here to stay".

These visits have helped to focus on the complementary potentials of the two countries. There is optimism in the countries that collaboration can be realised in socio-economic development, education, agriculture and other fields.

Malaysia, as a trading nation and a country whose Gross Domestic Product is becoming increasingly dependent on manufacturing, realises that geographical distance, cultural and other differences should not be a constraint on the development of closer ties with other countries.

In this regard, while Malaysia and Malawi are separated by "seemingly great geographical distance", this has been more than "adequately compensated by strong mutual regard, goodwill and friendship between our peoples", Dr Mahathir said.

Citing an example, he said the joint venture between Telekom Malaysian and Malawi Post and Telecommunication Corp is a source of encouragement for further collaboration. Dr Mahathir said these joint ventures can be largely realised through good networking between the private sectors of the two countries.

However, Dr Mahathir hastened to add that "a little encouragement from the Government is essential" and noted that this is forthcoming from the Malawian Government.

Referring to the inclusion of important Malaysian private sector representatives, businessmen and entrepreneurs in his delegation, Dr Mahathir said their presence is to encourage more networking with the private sector in Malawi.

It has been Malaysia's experience that cooperation between the private sectors in two different countries bring about "a new dimension, dynamism and momentum to bilateral ties. They often set a pace that cannot be easily planned and executed by governments", the Prime Minister said.

The Malaysia Incorporated Policy seeks to achieve a harmonious but business-like and friendly association between the private and the public

sectors.

Referring to relations between Malaysia and Malawi, Dr Mahathir said Malawi, thanks largely to Telekom Malaysia, "is not an unknown country in Malaysia". The English language and the desire of the peoples in the two countries to "advance economically, offers us opportunities to look ahead and achieve cooperation".

On a government-to-government level, Malaysia has sought through various mechanisms to impart some of the knowledge, expertise and technology to other countries of the South.

While the contacts have been slow in getting off the momentum is gathering, since 1990, a total of 42 Malawians have visited Malaysia under some of the programmes.

Earlier, at a ground-breaking ceremony for a RM70 million hotel being developed by G-Two Holdings and Malawi Development Corp, Dr Mahathir stressed the need to preserve the environment.

He advised the developers and other Malaysian entrepreneurs not just to think of bottomlines but to assist the locals as the "profits that you make come from the locals". The funds for the 159-room hotel will be raised offshore in Labuan.

At the ceremony, Dr Mahathir handed over a huge key as a symbol for the 100 low-cost houses that G-Two is building for the locals in Blantyre. The cost of the houses is being borne by the company itself.

Apart from G-Two Holdings, which is also venturing into power generation and development of holiday resorts in Malawi, Telekom Malaysia is another Malaysian company with a foothold the country. Telekom has established a GSM cellular telecommunications business with a major stake in Telekom Networks Malawi.

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