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## PM hails Croatia's peace commitment

MALAYSIA welcomes Croatia's foreign policy commitment to play a positive and constructive role in ensuring durable peace prevails in the south-eastern European region.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said while Croatia has successfully attained its 1,000-year dream of nationhood, its neighbour Bosnia Herzegovina is still grappling with fundamental issues of territorial integrity and governance.

"With Croatia's understanding and the crucial role of the international community, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been given a sovereign personality of its own. This sovereign personality can only be nurtured through an extraordinary effort to rebuild that country.

"In this regard, Malaysia is encouraged by the support shown by Croatia," he said at a dinner in Sri Perdana to welcome Croatian Prime Minister Zlatko Matesa on his three-day visit to Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur last night.

Citing the trauma, suffering and the ultimate death faced by the Bosnians, Dr Mahathir said the international community should first rebuild the damage incurred from the prolonged war in Bosnia Herzegovina so that the Bosnians can forget the horrors of the four-year-old war.

"Hopefully, this will help remove some of the scars of the war, both mental and physical. Time, we hope, will heal the wounds and a new and more tolerant society will emerge," he said, adding that Malaysia intends to continue to cooperate with other countries in building a climate of durable peace in South-eastern Europe.

"We believe that peace and stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina will be good for the entire region. It will be good for Serbia. It will also be good for Croatia.

"Confidence in the business climate will improve and the uneasy political and security situation will no longer be a source of concern. With regional stability in place, the focus of Government can shift to urgent economic priorities.

"A climate of peace, stability and mutual trust and confidence is an important prerequisite to economic growth. We fully appreciate the importance of steps that the Croatian Government has taken," he said.

On bilateral ties between Croatia and Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said both countries have been able to develop the friendly relations in the past six years.

Towards this end, he said Malaysian companies have been encouraged to tap the economic potentials through joint ventures with the Croatian companies.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia views Croatia as an important conduit for trade and services with central and south-eastern Europe.

"With Croatia's ability to adapt to the fast-changing international business environment, more business ventures can be generated between our two countries."

Meanwhile, Matesa in his speech said bilateral trade between Malaysia and Croatia is currently at more lower levels than are possible.

He said Croatia hopes to develop the partnership even further.

"Now we can focus on the enhancement of our bilateral relations which, after establishing our respective diplomatic missions, are broadening at all levels."

Matesa asked Dr Mahathir to further encourage Malaysian businessmen to invest in Croatia which has at its disposal educated and skilled manpower as well as traditionally being good relations with European market.

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