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PM: Close ties among Asia-Pacific countries vital

Rose Ismail in Ulan Bator, Mongolia

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said any attempt to isolate, contain or ostracise any country from playing its rightful role in the region's political and economic life could lead to discontentment and instability.

Speaking at an official dinner hosted by Mongolian Prime Minister M. Enkhosaikhan yesterday, Dr Mahathir said this was why close relations between all countries in the region were necessary.

Aside from the immediate economic benefits, he said close ties would provide the only guarantee for genuine peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

Malaysia, therefore, welcomed and supported the keen interest of Mongolia to forge closer relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including those in Southeast Asia.

He said the region's rapid economic development made it not only an important market of Mongolian products but also a rich source of investment of Mongolia. "I am confident that Mongolia's desire will be warmly reciprocated by the countries in the region."

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, arrived here yesterday afternoon for a four-day official visit to Mongolia. He is the first Malaysian Prime Minister to visit this northern Asian country.

He was greeted by top Mongolian officials at the Buyant-Ukhaa International Airport. The sky here, unlike in Kuala Lumpur, is dazzling blue but a chilly autumn wind sneaks right to the bones.

The Prime Minister's entourage includes Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik, Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Chong Kah Kiat and Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Abu Zahar Ithnin.

The rest include a 66-member high-powered business delegation led by Malaysia Mining Corporation Berhad chief executive Tan Sri Ibrahim Menudin.

Today, he will meet the chairman of the State Great Hural as well as the President of Mongolia. He will also witness the signing ceremonies for agreements and MoUs between Mongolian and Malaysian businessmen.

He is also here to commemorate the 26th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Mongolia.

In his speech at the Government House yesterday, Dr Mahathir noted that within the 26-year period, bilateral ties between the two countries had developed gradually.

Now, he said, the two countries were ready to enter a new phase of active relations.

Dr Mahathir said as Mongolia embarked on efforts to promote direct foreign investment and privatisation, he would encourage Malaysian businessmen to consider investing in sectors such as tourism, transportation, telecommunications, mining, housing and infrastructure construction.

He said there were already a number of Malaysian companies which were investing in a modest way in Mongolia.

Following his visit, he hoped more would do the same.  
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