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Prosperity best way to ensure peace

IN UNDERLINING its prosper-thy-neighbour approach, Malaysia has again shown that it is fully committed to work together with its "neighbours" for mutual benefit. This approach has proven to be beneficial for regional stability; Asean is a case in point where a commitment to cooperation and collaboration has in the last 30 years at first reduced and then eliminated the risks of confrontation and conflict within the region. The pursuit of this philosophy by the member countries has also seen Myanmar and Laos joining the fold.

However the term "neighbour" does not only refer to countries in Asean or South-East Asia; it also covers the entire developing world - the so-called South. In Asean's case, closer collaboration with other regional groupings in Asia, Africa and Latin America have produced substantial results. By prospering its neighbour, Asean has also prospered and is today one of the most dynamic groupings in the world. Malaysia too has made great strides in this context. For instance, since introducing the bilateral payments arrangement scheme in the late 1980s to facilitate trade with developing countries, total trade with the South has increased by over three-fold. A reflection of the success of this policy of helping each other to progress is the fact that Malaysia has in recent years been receiving a steady stream of leaders and businessmen from other developing countries.

However, at times there is more reason for Malaysia to help out. Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, requires and deserves all the assistance it can get to rebuild its economy. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, after all, was the biggest and often lone voice condemning the atrocities perpetrated during the civil war in the Balkan region, while the US, the powerful members of the UN Security Council, Nato and the West in general simply stood and watched the carnage. Malaysia's commitment to see political stability, economic renaissance and social justice in the Balkan state has never changed. In fact, Dr Mahathir stressed this week the need for the "fragile peace" that has been established in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be nurtured to become a genuine and durable one. While the Dayton Peace Accord is a good basis to start from, it is not without shortcomings. A genuine spirit of give-and-take can help to bring the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina together. It is also important to ensure that the horrors and atrocities are not repeated.

This would summon the fullest cooperation from the international community, especially from the economic superpowers. As for Malaysia, which has pledged economic assistance in the form of engaging its private sector in "whatever reconstruction projects" that need to be done, the formation of the consortium to look into this is in part the fulfilment of this promise. But then there is a limit to what a small, developing country like Malaysia can do for a nation which has just emerged from four long years of war and destruction. Without the commitment and assistance from other countries, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina's own neighbours, the reconstruction would take a longer time than is necessary.

It is perhaps timely for the European themselves to adopt the prosper-thy-neighbour policy. For a group of nations that has been so successful in establishing an economic fortress that is the European Union (EU) and are in the process of implementing the revolutionary single currency system under the European Monetary Union, it was a shame that Europe was

powerless to stop the Balkan war. Here then is an opportunity to put this failure behind them. The EU must seize the chance by using its enormous reserves to help ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina prospers. Prosperity is the surest way to safeguard peace and a lasting stability and well-being in that region will benefit Europe first, then the other parts of the world, including Malaysia.

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