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PM: Ties with Malawi would strengthen further

Azmi M. Anshar in Blantyre (Malawi)

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was optimistic that Malaysia-Malawi relations would strengthen further in the socio-economic, education, agriculture and other fields.

The Prime Minister said the strong bonds forged as a result of the exchange of bilateral visits would remain.

Speaking at a State banquet held in his honour, Dr Mahathir said: "There is optimism in both our countries that we will be able to realise collaboration in matters relating to socio-economic development, education, agriculture and other fields."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia also realised that geographical distance, cultural and other differences should not be a constraint on the development of closer ties with other countries, including Malawi.

He then explained why he always brought along a strong business contingent in his state or working visits abroad. Dr Mahathir said he found that the co-operation between the private sectors brought about a new dimension, dynamism and momentum to bilateral ties.

The Prime Minister said: "They often set a pace that cannot be easily planned and executed by governments."

He said the presence of Malaysian businessmen in his entourage was to help encourage more such networking with the private sector in Malawi.

The joint venture between Telekom Malaysia and the Malawi Post and Telecommunication Corporation 1995 was, for instance, a source of encouragement for further collaboration.

These joint ventures, Dr Mahathir said, can be largely realised through good networking between the private sectors of both countries.

"A little encouragement from the Government, however, is essential and I am glad this has been forthcoming," he said.

Malawi, thanks largely to Telekom Malaysia, was not an unknown country in Malaysia, he said.

"The facility of the English language and the desire of the Malaysian and Malawian peoples to advance economically," he said, "offers us opportunities to look ahead and achieve co-operation."

Valuing the access Malaysia established with Malawi, Dr Mahathir said while Malaysia and Malawi were separated by seemingly great geographical distance, this has been more than adequately compensated by strong mutual regard, goodwill and friendship between the two peoples.

Dr Mahathir said the visit to Malaysia of Malawi president Dr Bakili Muluzi in September 1996 had also helped the two countries to focus on complementary potentials.

On a government-to-government level, he said Malaysia sought through various mechanisms to impart knowledge, expertise and technology to other South countries.

Since 1990, he said 42 Malawians had visited Malaysia under some of these programmes and hoped more will benefit from Malaysia's Technical Co-operation Programme.

"We are glad that the days of concentration and conflict are largely over in the southern African region," he said.

The countries in the region are moving towards closer co-operation through their membership and participation in the Southern African Development Community," he said.

"I am confident that with the stable political and economic environment

prevailing in the region," he said, "the kind of co-operation that Malaysia and Malawi have established can be extended to include certain regions."

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