

01/10/1997

Study possibility of direct shipping links, urges Dr M

Kamarul Yunus in Santiago

SANTIAGO, Tues: Malaysian and Chilean companies have been asked to seriously study the possibility of establishing direct shipping links between their countries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in view of the increasing trade between Chile and Malaysia, there is a real need to establish such a link.

"I urge the business communities of both countries to seriously study this project and make an effort to set up this important linkage, which can help to reduce costs and increase trade," he said at a dinner hosted by Chile President Eduardo Frei here last night.

Apart from this, he said, when direct air links are established between Kuala Lumpur and Santiago next year, greater windows of opportunities in tourism and trade will become available.

"However, we need to move ahead as there is so much more we can accomplish.

"Thus, there is a real necessity to establish direct shipping links," he added.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here on Sunday, is on a four-day official visit to Chile, after paying an official visit to Cuba beginning September 25.

He said bilateral trade continues to grow as both Malaysia and Chile seek ways to expand the range of products that the countries can buy and sell to each other.

Since his first visit to Chile in 1991, bilateral trade has increased from RM146.92 million to RM624.52 million last year. In the first quarter of this year alone, the bilateral trade reached RM350.9 million.

In terms of Malaysian investment in Chile, several joint ventures have been set up between companies of both nations.

Projects include the redevelopment of new township in San Bernardo involving a consortium of Malaysian South-South Corp and Chilean companies, which was launched by Dr Mahathir and Frei yesterday.

The township project, formerly a railway workshop, involves the development of shopping malls, office buildings and apartments.

MTD Capital and Chilean El Principal S.A. are also developing a golf course in Pirque, about 45km from here.

Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton), meanwhile, has exported more than 1,000 Proton cars to Chile and the national car has captured 4 per cent of the car market in Chile.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia is ready to extend the hand of friendship and cooperation to Chileans who want to find a niche for themselves in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean).

"To those Chileans who wish to make inroads into our part of the world, I suggest you make Malaysia the base for your operations.

"We can provide you with all that you need given Malaysia's strategic geographic location," he added.

Dr Mahathir also urged Chile and other trading partners in Latin American as well as the South to work together to chart their own destiny.

"If we the countries of the South stand together, we can indeed determine our own destiny.

"In this post-Cold War, the tendency is for the powerful to dictate the way the weak should govern themselves.

"Already, there are many examples where developing countries have been

made to serve the vested interests of the more powerful countries. The latest example is in South-East Asia where the currency speculation by rogue manipulators brought about disastrous consequences on the economies of these countries," he added.

Individually, he said, the South countries would not be able to fight unjust actions by the rich and powerful. "But collectively and united in a single purpose, we can at least stand up to them," he said, adding Malaysia believed organisations such such Asean, the Group of 15 and the Non-Aligned Movement hold the key to this collective strength.

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