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Malaysia pledges to help Ethiopia recover

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MALAYSIA has pledged to cooperate with Ethiopia in the country's national reconciliation effort and share experience with Ethiopia to develop its economic sectors.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in the spirit of South-South cooperation, Malaysia will do its utmost to assist Ethiopia.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the First Finance Minister, identified agriculture, agro-based activities, telecommunications and hydrocarbon development as potential areas for cooperation.

He said although Malaysia and Ethiopia had very little contact in the past three decades, the two countries have many things in common.

"We are both multicultural countries and we believe in power-sharing as reflected in the consensus-seeking spirit underlying the concept of our governments.

"The success of both our peoples depends on our ability to promote positive cooperation and co-existence. Ethiopia and Malaysia must contend with the challenge of bridging the gap between different segments of our societies," he said in his address at the official dinner in honour of his Ethiopian counterpart, Mr Meles Zenawi, at Sri Perdana last night.

Dr Mahathir noted both governments attach high priority to promoting rapid and sustained economic growth in seeking a better life for the people.

"The key to fair income distribution is to ensure that everyone gets an equitable share of an enlarged cake, rather than trying to redistribute the crumbs of a shrinking cake."

The Prime Minister said Malaysia understands and sympathises with the pain and deprivation that Ethiopia has suffered because of the prolonged civil war "which was aided and abetted by foreign interests".

From being one of the world's most renowned civilisations, it is sad and regrettable that Ethiopia has fallen victim to such a tragedy, he said.

"We in Malaysia have watched with interest and admiration the efforts of your excellency to consolidate the peace acquired through much hardship and sacrifice.

"We also know that it is due to your untiring determination that Ethiopia has progressed after two decades of civil strife to become a united and forward-looking nation that it is today," he added.

Earlier, Malaysia and Ethiopia signed three agreements to boost economic, trade and investment cooperation.

The accords were signed after a meeting between Dr Mahathir and Zenawi.

The Malaysian Government also agreed to extend technical assistance to Ethiopia in the palm oil and rubber sectors.

Briefing reporters on the outcome of the two-hour meeting between the leaders, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Malaysia, in addition, will help Ethiopia strengthen its investment-related institutions.

Abdullah signed the Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, Trade, and Investment Promotion and Protection agreements on behalf of Malaysia

Ethiopia was represented by its Trade and Industry Minister Kasahun Ayele.

At his meeting with Dr Mahathir, Zenawi said Ethiopia is now free from internal and external problems.

"As such, the country is seeking to enhance ties with other countries, including Malaysia," Abdullah said.

Dr Mahathir told Zenawi and his delegation that Malaysian investors are currently facing problems investing overseas in view of the regional economic turmoil, but this is not expected to last long.

Zenawi arrived yesterday for five-day official visit to promote trade and investment. The last visit to Malaysia by an Ethiopian leader, His Majesty Haile Selassie, was in 1968.

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