

05 MAR 1998

Mahathir-China

MALAYSIA WILLING TO BE THE VENUE FOR CHINA-TAIWAN TALKS

KUALA LUMPUR, March 5 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today reiterated that it is willing to be the venue for China-Taiwan talks provided there is a request from Beijing and Taipei.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad however clarified that Kuala Lumpur was not making an offer.

"We have to think of (providing) service because our policy is to try and facilitate dialogue and resolution of problems in the region," he told reporters after opening the International Timber Conference 1998 here.

The Prime Minister was asked to comment on his statement in an interview with a Taipei newspaper yesterday that the Malaysian government was willing to offer a venue for Taiwan and China to hold talks.

He was quoted as telling the Chinese-language "Commercial Times" that Malaysia was "willing to provide the basic facilities for the two sides to discuss their unification issue."

The report also quoted Dr Mahathir as saying that Kuala Lumpur has always maintained a "one-China" policy.

Malaysia recognises only China and not Taiwan.

The Prime Minister, in the interview, also said the Malaysian government hoped Taiwan and China could make peace as soon as possible as this would benefit the long-standing rivals along with the rest of Asia.

Asked today if he has spoken to China and Taiwan about Malaysia's willingness to be the venue, Dr Mahathir said he did not.

He said his remarks on the proposed talks were in response to questions posed by the press (the Commercial Times).

China and Taiwan held two years of semi official-level talks in the early 1990s, but Beijing, which views Taiwan as a rebel province that must be unified with the mainland, suspended the talks in mid-1995 after a United States visit by Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui.

Asked by a Taiwanese TV journalist on his meeting with Taiwan vice president Lien Chan later today, Dr Mahathir said they would discuss trade between Malaysia and Taiwan.

Lien Chan arrived here yesterday for a four-day private visit.

He said the two countries could expand cooperation in the field of trade, investments and transfer of technology.

Asked if Taiwan should play a greater role in Southeast Asia, Dr Mahathir said Taiwan was in a very good position to stimulate the economies of the region which has been hit by financial and economic problems.

"They (Taiwan) have the know-how, they have the capital, they have the expertise," he said. -- BERNAMA

ES RM