

06/03/1998

`Taipeh capable of helping region'

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday said Taiwan, with its present economic strength, places it in a good position to stimulate the economies of South-East Asia.

"It has the knowhow, capital and resources in all things," he told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday after opening the 1998 International Timber Conference.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether he would seek a greater role from Taiwan to revive the economies in the region during his meeting with visiting Taiwanese Vice President Lien Chan later in the day.

On issues that would be raised during the meeting, he said they include trade and investments between Taiwan and Malaysia, as well as on issue of technology transfer.

To a question with regards to funds that Taiwan were reported to willingly disburse to the region but having difficulty in finding the channel, Dr Mahathir said: "We should study such a possibility. Such an offer, I think, is too good to be rejected off hand ... There must be something we can utilise from funds to help to revive the economies of South-East Asia," he added.

Asked about a possible mediator role in the China-Taiwan talks, Dr Mahathir clarified that Malaysia did not say that it is offering itself for such a position.

"We did not say we are offering or making anything like that. We have to think of providing service because our policy facilitates dialogue and resolution of problems in the region," he added.

It was reported in a Taipeh newspaper that the Malaysian Government was willing to offer a venue for China and Taiwan to hold talks. The Chinese-language newspaper was quoting Dr Mahathir as saying that Kuala Lumpur has always maintained a one-China policy.

China and Taiwan held two years of semi-official level talks in the early 1990s. The talks were suspended in mid-1995.

To a question on the proposed Asia-Europe Trust Fund, which will be used to provide technical assistance for financial restructuring and examine the social impact caused by the economic problems, Dr Mahathir said: "We do not need many foreign experts.

"We have already done a lot of economic reformations," he added.

(END)