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Taiwan can help Asean economies, says Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Taiwan which has the technology, capital and expertise is in a good position to play a greater role in stimulating the economies of Southeast Asian nations, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He was replying to a question at a Press conference on the role that Taiwan could play in helping the region, after opening the 1998 International Timber Conference today.

The Prime Minister was also asked by a Taiwanese TV reporter as to what would be discussed when he met Taiwanese Vice-President Lien Chan.

"Trade and investment and also transfer of technology between Malaysia and Taiwan."

Lien also met Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Lien is on a private four-day visit to Malaysia which recognises only Beijing but maintains economic ties with Taipeh.

Asked to comment on reports that Taiwan was preparing to establish a fund to help Southeast Asia nations, Dr Mahathir said: "We should study the offer which is too good to be rejected off hand. There must be some way to utilise the funds to help revive the economy of Southeast Asia".

Asked whether Malaysia had conveyed its willingness to offer a venue for China and Taiwan to hold talks on possible unification, Dr Mahathir said there were no offers made.

It was reported today that a Taipeh newspaper (the Chinese language Commercial Times) had published a story quoting Dr Mahathir as saying that Malaysia was willing to offer a venue for Taiwan and China to hold talks on unification.

He said his remarks on the proposed talks were in response to questions posed by the Press.

"But, if we are requested by both sides, we can be of service because our policy is to try and facilitate dialogue and find solutions to problems within the region."

However, Dr Mahathir said he did not receive any request from either country to choose Malaysia as the venue.

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 visit by Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui to the US.

On the proposed Asem trust fund which among others would be used to provide technical expertise to help Asian countries affected by the economic problem, the Prime Minister said anything positive was welcomed.

Asked whether Malaysia still needed financial experts to assist in economic reforms, he said the country did not need many foreign experts since the Government had carried out the reforms.

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