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Mahathir-Bangladesh

M'SIA TO CONTINUE INVESTING IN BANGLADESH, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

DHAKA, March 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will continue to increase trade and investment with Bangladesh in efforts to create more employment opportunities, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

However, it is unable to fulfil Dhaka's request for Malaysia to take in more workers unless the economy recovers, he said during bilateral talks with Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina here.

The call to raise trade and investment and the request to increase workers' recruitment came up during their brief four-eye meeting held prior to the opening of the second summit of the group of Islamic developing countries (D-8).

Briefing the media on the outcome of the talks, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia's investment totalled US\$900 million last year and was set to increase.

Malaysian investments in Bangladesh comprised a gas development project undertaken by Petronas, Celcom's involvement in cellular phone operations and Telekom Malaysia Bhd's development of telecommunications infrastructure.

Dr Mahathir also pointed out that Malaysian companies could invest in Bangladesh to take advantage of its reasonably low cost of labour, which would go far in alleviating severe unemployment in that country through the creation of jobs.

As for bilateral trade, Syed Hamid said although it was in Malaysia's favour, one should consider that the 150,000 or so Bangladeshi workers remit some US\$100 million to their country.

Total trade last year rose to RM724.4 million compared with RM563.8 million in 1997, with Malaysian exports amounting to RM699.6 million in 1998 and imports only RM24.8 million.

The main export items from Malaysia were ships, boats, floating structures, palm oil, textile yarn, refined petroleum products, as well as soap, cleansing and polishing preparations.

Imports from Bangladesh comprised crustaceans and molluscs, photographic apparatus and equipment, special transactions and commodities, sack and bags made of jute and printed matters.

Later, the Prime Minister also paid a courtesy call on Iranian First Vice-President Dr Hassan Habibi, with discussions concentrated on enhancing bilateral trade and investment.

Dr Mahathir said procedures for trade and investment should be made simpler wherever possible, including harmonisation of customs procedures and export and import regulations.

Syed Hamid said Hassan suggested that both countries endeavour to promote tourism in each other's markets.

Both also agreed on the need to exchange information and learn from their experiences that could facilitate more effective economic cooperation.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia and Iran should work together in order for both parties to have a deeper understanding of Islam, and that there should be more dialogues on the subject.

On Tuesday, the Prime Minister will call on Pakistani Prime Minister Nawar Sharif who is also here to attend the D-8 summit.

Earlier Monday, Dr Mahathir travelled by helicopter to visit the Savar Smriti Shoudha warriors memorial, located some 25 kilometres from here,

where he laid a wreath and planted a sapling.

Also present at the function was his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah.

-- BERNAMA

MR YBY