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Mahathir-Bosnia

ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES FOR BOSNIA WILL RESUME, SAYS DR M

By: Wan A. Hulaimi

SARAJEVO, Oct 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Wednesday trade relations between Malaysia and Bosnia Herzegovina and assistance programmes for Bosnia would resume now that Malaysia had recovered from the regional financial crisis.

He said Malaysia was in a better position now to cooperate with Bosnia in business as well as in other areas which he did not identify.

He said he had brought with him a group of Malaysian businessmen to help identify what products Malaysia could buy from here to increase bilateral trade.

"In our discussions today, we identified even the companies that should be involved in this bilateral cooperation," he told reporters after meeting outgoing Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic at the presidency building, here.

With Dr Mahathir in this half-day visit were Airod Chief Executive Officer Tan Sri Ahmad Johan, MBI Ventures Managing Director Mohd Zaini Amran, Tengku Datuk Adnan Mansor and Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) Chief Executive Officer Datuk Abdul Rahman Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir also hoped that Sarajevo-based Yugoslav companies that were involved in construction work in Malaysia before the Balkan war would return to Malaysia and be active again and even get involved in joint-venture programmes.

Izetbegovic, who also spoke at the brief press conference, said Dr Mahathir also met other members of the Presidency Council soon after his arrival here today.

The presidency of Bosnia is rotated between the major ethnic groups of Muslim Bosnians, Croats and Serbs.

He described Dr Mahathir as "one of the closest and best friends of Bosnia Herzegovina before and after the war."

This was the second visit here by Dr Mahathir after the Dayton agreement. The first was soon after the war ended when he had to be housed in a guest house with windows that were boarded up as protection against sniper fire.

Dr Mahathir had also visited Bosnia Herzegovina before the war started.

The meeting with the Presidency Council and the press conference were held in Austro-Hungarian presidency building which escaped attack during the two-year siege by Serb aggressors.

At the press conference, Dr Mahathir also presented a cheque for RM200,000 to Izetbegovic as donation from the Malaysian public for returnees to Srebrenica, an area where one of the worst mass slaughter of Muslims by Serbs occurred towards the end of the war.

The area was then under the surveillance of Dutch UN forces.

Today, Dr Mahathir, in the presence of Bosnian Deputy Foreign Minister Hussein Zivalj and the Mayor of Sarajevo Dr Muhidin Hamamdzic, also presented another cheque on behalf of the Bosnian Action Front in Malaysia to the Imam of the Starigrad (old town) area for its rebuilding programme.

The Khusraw-Bey Mosque, built 12 years after the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511, was one of the finest achievements of Ottoman Sarajevo.

The mosque was built as a model Islamic enlightened architecture with a library stocked with valuable and rare Muslim manuscripts covering all fields, a madrasah, a fountain, a clock tower and a "muvekitana" a room equipped with instruments for measuring the sun's elevation.

The clock tower has been destroyed many times in Bosnia's turbulent past, and like Bosnia itself. it always survived in a restored condition in the ensuing period of calm.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir visited a school in the predominantly Muslim Dobrinja area near the airport. The school which had been razed to the ground was reopened this month from donations totalling more than US\$1 million from Malaysian students and teachers.

During his short stay here, Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali were accommodated at Konak, a historic guesthouse which was also used by the Archduke Ferdinand during his visit here early this century.

His assassination by a Serb gunman named Princip near the famous bridge here triggered the First World War.

Before leaving Bosnia for Malaysia, Dr Mahathir gave a lecture to a group of 80 invited guests at the Faculty of Law building at the University of Sarajevo.

Dr Mahathir was also interviewed by Bosnian TV and radio as well as by a journalist from the newspaper "Ljiljan."

Ljiljan publisher was responsible for the translation of Dr Mahathir's book "New Deal for Asia" (New Deal zur Azijn) into Bosnian language.

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