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Malaysia to boost trade with Bosnia

Ahirudin Attan in Sarajevo

MALAYSIA and Bosnia-Herzegovina "renewed" the close co-operation they had before the Asian meltdown with new initiatives to boost trade and investment.

Making his first visit to this country since the 1997 economic crisis, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said new areas of co-operation, as well as the companies that will participate in the new initiatives, had been identified.

At the same time, Malaysia has also agreed to buy more products from Bosnia-Herzegovina to improve bilateral trade.

"Now that Malaysia has recovered from the crisis, we are in a better position to co-operate with Bosnia-Herzegovina," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference held with President Alija Izetbegovic at the presidential palace.

"In our discussions, we identified areas where we can work together, even the companies to be involved in these projects.

"Some Yugoslav companies were active in Malaysia, especially in the construction sector, during the pre-war period. Most of them were from Sarajevo. We hope that these companies can once again be active and take part in construction activities in Malaysia.

"We hope at the same time to identify products we can buy from Bosnia to improve bilateral trade. It is for these reasons I have brought with me businessmen from Malaysia on this visit," Dr Mahathir said.

MBI Ventures managing director Zaini Amra, Airod Malaysia chief executive officer Ahmad Joham and CIDB chief executive officer Abdul Rahman Abdullah were part of the Prime Minister's team during the delegation meeting with President Izetbegovic and his senior ministers.

Also present were Shafiz Abdullah, the assistant special functions officer in the Prime Minister's Department, and Hatimi Abas, Charge d'Affaires at the Malaysian Embassy in Sarajevo.

President Izetbegovic, in his remarks, spoke to Dr Mahathir as "one of the closest friends of Bosnia-Herzegovina".

"I would like to express the gratitude of my Government and people as well as my own for his support during the war, and in peace time. Malaysia is the first country to recognise Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent country," he said through an interpreter.

President Izetbegovic said he was happy that Malaysia had recovered from the Asian economic crisis and expressed the hope that businessmen from both countries would work to step up co-operation.

The Bosnian president is tipped to step down today, ahead of the country's Nov 3 general elections.

His ruling party's success in the reconstruction of the country is expected to be a major factor in the outcome of the election.

Further success in the reconstruction will hinge on the support of foreign countries, including Malaysia.

Malaysia was one of the earliest to be involved in the economic redevelopment of Bosnia Herzegovina, apart from being the loudest voice at the United Nations and other international forums that in the end pressured the international community to end Serb aggression against Bosnian Muslims.

Senior officials of the Bosnian ruling party, the SDA, hinted that Dr Mahathir's visit could help President Izetbegovic rally the support of the

Muslim electorate before next month's election.
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