

01/08/2000

PM: We'll continue recruiting Bangladeshis

Sarban Singh

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Malaysia will continue to recruit workers from Bangladesh as they have contributed positively to the development of the Malaysian economy, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

At present, employers are only allowed to recruit foreign workers in certain sectors of the economy. Recruitment is only allowed once they obtain special approval from the Home Ministry.

"We are appreciative of the positive contribution made by Bangladeshi workers in the development of Malaysia's economy.

"Malaysia will continue to recruit workers from Bangladesh as and when necessary," he said at a dinner held in honour of Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Seri Perdana.

Malaysia imposed a ban on the recruitment of foreigners in 1997 following the regional economic crisis. There are currently about 150,000 legal Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia.

(However, the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Workers relaxed the ban on the recruitment of foreign workers in February this year.)

At one time, there were about 300,000 Bangladeshi workers here.

Sheikh Hasina is on a three-day official visit to Malaysia. She is accompanied by 35 business executives who are scheduled to hold talks with their Malaysian counterparts in efforts to boost economic and trade co-operation.

Dr Mahathir said he was glad that relations between the two countries were progressing satisfactorily.

He said bilateral trade had also been on the increase, amounting to RM263 million in the first five months of the year.

"However, such trade constitutes only a small percentage of our total world trade volume. Greater efforts should, therefore, be made to take advantage of the opportunities available in expanding our trade relations," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was glad to note that some Malaysian companies were already operating in Bangladesh through joint ventures.

Malaysia is listed as the third largest foreign investor in Bangladesh with total investments of US\$1.32 billion (RM5.02 billion) by the Bangladeshi Board of Investment.

"I believe the presence of Malaysian investors reflects the confidence that they have in Bangladesh's economy arising from the success of the economic policies pursued by Your Excellency's government," he said.

Dr Mahathir hoped with Malaysia's economic recovery, more Malaysian companies would venture abroad including in Bangladesh.

At the same time, he hoped Bangladeshi companies would also be encouraged to be more aggressive in attracting potential joint venture partners from Malaysia to invest in Bangladesh.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia also lauded the commitment of the Bangladeshi government in pursuing an open-market economy with private sector-led economic growth and development.

The measures taken to activate and strengthen the role of the private sector in trade and industry, he said, would contribute to stimulating economic growth in Bangladesh.

"It is important that a business-friendly environment be created in Bangladesh to attract foreign investors.

"No investment will take place without peace and stability," he said.

Dr Mahathir also commended Sheikh Hasina for her able leadership in solving internal insurgency and for creating a peaceful and stable environment in Bangladesh.

The Malaysian government, he said, also admired her determination to realise the vision of her father to build a "Sonar Bangla" or Golden Bengal.

On another note, Dr Mahathir said co-operation among Muslim nations was an important dimension of Malaysia's foreign policy.

"Malaysia regards Bangladesh as an important member of D8 and the Organisation of Islamic Conference and we look forward to working closely with Bangladesh in the interest of the ummah," he added.

Sheikh Hasina, in her speech, extended an invitation to Malaysian entrepreneurs to make Bangladesh their next foreign destination.

She hoped Bangladesh and Malaysia would work together and help each other in facing the challenges of globalisation, liberalisation, information technology and communication era.

"I am confident that my visit will help further strengthen our existing bonds of friendship," she added.