

PM's visit a 'breakthrough'

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Poland confers its highest award on Dr Mahathir

From Syed Nadzri in Warsaw

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was accorded a red carpet welcome here yesterday at the start of what was described by his Polish counterpart as a "breakthrough visit".

Shortly after arriving from Berlin in a private jet at the Okęcie Military Airport, Dr Mahathir was taken to Polish Prime Minister Leszek Miller's chancellery for an official welcome ceremony followed by a delegation meeting.

It was at a brief joint Press conference that followed that Miller remarked that Dr Mahathir's visit was a breakthrough since it was the first by a Malaysian leader since diplomatic relations were established 30 years ago. The two leaders said they discussed matters of common interest, especially those related to strengthening trade links.

Poland, it is understood, is trying hard to get Malaysia to buy its military equipment but nothing has been finalised so far.

Dr Mahathir was also conferred the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland by Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski, the country's highest award to a foreign dignitary.

Dr Mahathir, who has had a hectic week in his whirlwind tour of Russia and Germany, was accompanied by a large delegation of senior Government officials and businessmen. At a business luncheon talk, he proposed that Malaysian and Polish businessmen look into the possibility of jointly pursuing commercially viable projects in third countries.

He said economic relations between the two countries had followed a somewhat set pattern all these years, but the current shift

towards globalisation could change this.

"The intensification of globalisation is offering us tremendous opportunities to reconfigure that pattern to our mutual advantage. Collaboration between our business communities should not be confined to exploring opportunities within each other's borders.

"Malaysian and Polish businessmen should also identify areas of complementarities and together pursue commercially viable projects in third countries," he said at the luncheon attended by some of the top businessmen of both countries.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a three-day official visit to Poland, however cautioned about the downside of globalisation and suggested that the two countries work together.

"Both countries have created an open economy, pursuing an aggressive policy of economic engagement with other countries and letting the private sector take the lead in economic activities. As such there should be many areas of commonalities that will enable us to take a common stand in various international fora."

In his speech, Dr Mahathir also campaigned vigorously for better bilateral economic and trade ties, giving Polish businessmen present a glimpse of how supportive the Malaysian Government is towards private sector businesses.

Poland, he said, is Malaysia's largest trading partner among the Central and Eastern European countries. But the main task is to strengthen these ties.

"My presence here with a large delegation of senior government officials and representatives of the Malaysian private sector is testimony of that interest," he added.

Dr Mahathir later attended a demonstration of Polish-made main battle tanks at the Warsaw Armoured Brigade headquarters.