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`We could buy Pakistan's dairy products'

Ramlan Said

MALAYSIA and Pakistan shared many similarities that can be exploited to help increase trade between both countries, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said dairy products of Pakistan were among those Malaysia could buy more to help balance trade, which now favoured Malaysia.

He said Malaysia could turn to Pakistan, which was the fifth largest producer of dairy products, from its traditional suppliers of New Zealand and Australia.

Another sector that interests Malaysia is the textile industry.

Addressing top Pakistani businessmen at a dialogue organised by the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry at Serena Hotel yesterday Dr Mahathir, on a two-day working visit to Pakistan, said: "We would like to invest more in Pakistan and there exist many fields of cooperation between both countries that can be exploited.

"But the situation (in Pakistan) must be suitable and attractive to investors."

Citing Malaysia's success in attracting foreign investment, Dr Mahathir said the keys were stability, consistency of policies and conducive environment.

He noted that Pakistan, under the leadership of President Pervez Musharraf, had achieved much in this respect over the last three years, and Malaysia was happy for the progress made.

During the dialogue, many businessmen representing various sectors wanted to see a more active participation of Malaysian companies in Pakistan.

On a lighter note, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was at its wits end to balance the trade with Pakistan.

As a country with 82 per cent of its exports being manufactured goods, he said Malaysia was in a position to sell more things than buy them for its people.

He said Malaysia was interested to examine the possibility of importing dairy goods from Pakistan. "But we can't force our consumers (to buy Pakistan goods) as we practice an open market.

"Therefore, Pakistan companies have to compete. If you visit our supermarkets, you can see that they stock products from many countries.

"Of course we would like to see more Pakistani products in Malaysia as although Malaysia does not have that big a population, the purchasing power of its people is quite significant.

"One way that should be explored is to hold a 'Pakistani Week' in Malaysia like what's being done by some other countries."

Dr Mahathir said another area which Malaysia could participate was the cultivation of oil palm in Pakistan, especially of new clones that produce higher yields.

This would mean Pakistan could reduce its import of the commodity from Malaysia.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir arrived at Islamabad's Chaklala International Airport from Hyderabad, India, and was welcomed by Pakistan Foreign Affairs Minister Inam ul-Haq and Minister of Finance, who is also minister-in-attendance, Shaukat Aziz.

Accompanying the Prime Minister were, among others, Datuk Seri Dr

Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

Dr Mahathir then proceeded to Serena Hotel where he attended a closed-door briefing on information communication technology (ICT) by Pakistan Minister of Science and Technology Dr Atta-ur-Rahman.

The Prime Minister also met Pakistani ICT experts at the function.

Dr Mahathir then performed Friday prayers at Faisal Mosque.

In conjunction with his visit, the Prime Minister witnessed two signing ceremonies, the handing over of donations by Umno Youth and launched a power plant built by Tenaga Nasional Berhad.

The 235MW Liberty Power Plant at Daharki, Sindh Province, is now feeding 210MW into the national grid owned by Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority.

The plant cost RM450 million to build and was the company's sole investment overseas.

Umno Youth presented 60 tonnes of clothing to Minister of Information cum Kashmir Affairs, Northern Areas and State and Frontier Region (KANA and SAFRON) Nisar A. Memon in a project to help Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

The movement was represented by its exco member Datuk Ab Rauf Yusoh.

Dr Mahathir also witnessed the signing of project agreement on liquid cargo jetty terminal on BOT (build, operate and transfer) basis at Post Qasim, Karachi, between Felda Holdings and Qasim Port Authority.

The other signing was between Jawala Corporation and its local counterpart.

Later at night, Dr Mahathir and Musharraf met for talks.