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Mahathir-Trade

M'SIA MULLS MILK IMPORTS FROM PAKISTAN TO NARROW TRADE GAP

By: Azman Ujang

ISLAMABAD, Oct 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is considering to buy milk and other dairy products from Pakistan as a means to narrow the bilateral trade imbalance now hugely in its favour, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here today.

But it would be up to Malaysian consumers to decide if they would switch to Pakistani milk and such products which Malaysia now largely sourced from New Zealand and Australia, he told leading Pakistani businessmen at a dialogue at the Serena Hotel here where the prime minister is staying during his two-day visit starting today.

Dr Mahathir said although Malaysia had a population of 24 million people, its consumption of food products was more than many countries with a much larger population and the country was importing goods from practically all over the world.

"You have to compete in our market to see if our consumers like the taste of your milk products because we can't force them to buy anything they don't like as our market is a very free one," he said.

During the dialogue, several Pakistani businessmen impressed on the prime minister a wide range of products that Malaysia could import to address the trade imbalance now in Malaysia's favour by a ratio of 9:1.

A businessman said Pakistan produced 26 billion litres of milk annually from eight million cows and 40 million buffaloes and its milk was the second cheapest in the world after New Zealand.

The prime minister asked Pakistani businessmen to send more trade missions to Malaysia to introduce their products to Malaysian consumers.

He also said Pakistan could look into planting oil palm to reduce its imports of palm oil which now was the country's largest import item from Malaysia.

"We took rubber seeds from Brazil and palm oil clones from West Africa but now we produce better clones than them and that is why we are not quite welcome in these countries and we are the world'd largest exporter of palm oil," he said.

He also said a key to Malaysia's success as a trading nation was its consistent policy and political stability that enabled the country to have trade as a larger component of its gross domestic product (GDP) than even Japan and the United States.

He said some 82 per cent of Malaysia's exports were manufactured goods and with only 18 per cent being primary commodities.

Dr Mahathir later inaugurated the RM1.8 billion Liberty power plant, a fully-owned independent power producer by Malaysia's Tenaga Nasional Bhd.

-- BERNAMA

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