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Mahathir-Centre

M'SIA HOPES UKRAINE PROVIDE DISTRIBUTION CENTRE FOR PALM OIL

By: Mohd Kamel Othman

KIEV (Ukraine), July 14 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has expressed Malaysia's hope that Ukraine could provide a distribution centre for Malaysian palm oil and other products for the East European market.

He said Ukraine's strategic position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia makes that prospect very attractive.

On the other hand, he said, Ukraine had a gateway to the other Asean nations and by extension the rest of East Asia.

"Furthermore, with the realisation of the Asean Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 2004, a market of over 500 million people is open to you through Malaysia. We are Ukraine's logical springboard for the region," he said when speaking at an official dinner hosted by Ukrainian President Leonid D. Kuchma at the Mariinsskyi Palace here Monday.

Asean groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a four-day official visit to Ukraine beginning Sunday, also urged Malaysian and Ukrainian businessmen to promote their respective companies and products through participation in trade fairs and exhibitions to exchange ideas through dialogues and seminars.

Dr Mahathir is the first Malaysian Prime Minister to visit the former Soviet republic since diplomatic relations were established between both countries in March 1991.

Ukraine, situated in the south-eastern part of Central Europe, is the biggest eastern European country after Russia covering over 600,000 square kilometres. It borders the Black Sea, Belarus, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia and Slovakia.

Dr Mahathir also expressed Malaysia's gratitude to Ukraine for opening their academic doors to Malaysian students pursuing their studies in medicine and engineering.

The Crimea alone is home to more than 500 medical students.

"Ukrainian students too are welcome to pursue their studies in Malaysia as it offers interesting courses that could bring about greater understanding of different cultures and religions," he said.

On his visit to Ukraine, Dr Mahathir said that it is a testament to the strength of Malaysia-Ukraine relationship characterised by warmth and friendship since diplomatic ties were established in 1991.

"Our bilateral ties premised on mutual respect and understanding have seen remarkable progress since the establishment of Ukrainian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Ukraine's strength lies in its extraordinary people whose skills, talents and resourcefulness in the fields of science, medicine and aviation are the envy of many.

"Ukraine can stand tall and proud as you have freed yourself from communism and embraced a democratic free market system. The path to economic development is never easy or smooth but you have endeavoured to introduce reforms," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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