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Mahathir-Cooperation

MALAYSIA READY TO ENHANCE COOPERATION WITH PNG

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

PORT MORESBY, Oct 24 (Bernama) - Driving home Malaysia's "prosper-thy-neighbour" policy, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight Malaysia will be happy to assist Papua New Guinea in its development plan and share its experience especially in the financial and banking sector.

"We understand that Papua New Guinea is undergoing a challenging period in modernising its economy.

"Malaysia too had faced serious challenges against our economy including attacks on our currency by rogue currency traders in 1997/98.

"We would be happy to share with Papua New Guinea our experience in restructuring and overcoming these difficulties," he said at an official dinner hosted in his honour by Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare here.

Dr Mahathir arrived here earlier today for a two-day visit after a three-day trip to newly-independent Timor Leste where he had also emphasized Malaysia's philosophy of prospering its neighbours.

Dr Mahathir exchanged views on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual concern with Sir Michael at the PNG Prime Minister's Office at Parliament House. This was followed by a delegation meeting.

"I am happy that we are in agreement that there is indeed common ground for us to increase the scope and depth of our relations and cooperation," said Dr Mahathir who also called on Papua New Guinea Governor-General Sir Silas Atopara.

In line with Malaysia's commitment to foster South-South Cooperation, he said Malaysia had extended help to this South Pacific nation under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP).

To date, a good number of PNG personnel had attended training courses in Malaysian institutions and many others had benefited from study tours and attachment programmes.

He welcomed Papua New Guinea's move to reopen its High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, saying it truly demonstrated its government's firm commitment to strengthening relations with Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir noted that Malaysia's investment in Papua New Guinea totalled US\$457 million, making it the fourth largest investor and the largest from Asia.

The High Commission was closed in 2000 as part of cost saving measures of the former administration. Sir Michael, who attended the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Kuala Lumpur in February, reversed that decision this year.

This is Dr Mahathir's third visit to Papua New Guinea. He was here in 1982, a year after he became Prime Minister, and again in 1984 to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

In his message to welcome Dr Mahathir, Sir Michael said he was pleased that the relationship between the two countries had developed from mere diplomacy to trade relations and economic cooperation.

"We are honoured that you have chosen Papua New Guinea to be your last official engagement before you retire from active politics at the end of this month," he said in the message published in The National newspaper today.

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