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A matter of trade

GIVEN its economic potential and strategic location it is not surprising that the former Soviet republic of Ukraine is attracting Malaysia's interest as a business and trading partner. Malaysia's relatively open economy and emphasis on trade are among reasons why it has achieved remarkable progress while many other developing countries have floundered. Strengthening ties with Ukraine has nothing to do with whether we are leaning East or West.

As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said during his visit to Ukraine, Malaysia is a trading nation and we are looking for new markets and opportunities. The former communist states in Eastern Europe and newly-independent countries which were once part of the former Soviet Union had closed economies. However, things have now changed with their adoption of market economies and free enterprise. Countries such as Ukraine now offer exciting opportunities for Malaysian exports, investment and other exchanges in technology transfer and education. Ukraine, the second largest country after Russia carved out of the former Soviet Union, has some advanced industries in defence shipbuilding and aircraft. It offers Malaysia another source of supply which will help reduce our over-reliance on advanced technology from the traditional Western manufacturers. In turn, Malaysia can export commodities such as palm oil and manufactured products to Ukraine which will help to diversify our sources of trade. In an increasingly competitive and globalised world, Malaysia must constantly look for new markets and business opportunities.

Trade and economic exchanges should be mutually beneficial if they are to flourish over the longer term. Ukraine represents a new frontier for Malaysian enterprise which should continuously build on the initial ties and contacts in the trail blazed by Dr Mahathir.