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#### Beginning of true economic partnership among members

FOR a movement which has been deliberating political issues, today's NAM Business Forum marks the beginning of a true economic partnership among member states.

Sunway Group corporate advisor Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam said NAM was previously too pre-occupied with political issues and economic matters were only discussed on government-to-government basis.

This is set to change as the Business Forum would accelerate trade and investment co-operation among NAM states as it facilitates the private sector to conduct businesses without political and bureaucratic limitations.

"This is more so when businesses conducted have the 'blessings' from NAM governments," Navaratnam, who is also Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli) director, said in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

NAM Business Forum opens today with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad sharing his views on a new world order.

Business communities from NAM nations also have the opportunity to listen to other NAM leaders such as South African President and outgoing NAM chairman Thabo Mbeki, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Navaratnam, who will moderate a workshop on foreign direct investments (FDIs) and manufacturing on the second day of the forum, said the aim of having deeper trade and investment ties among NAM states can be realised faster with greater involvement from the private sector.

He said the business linkages resulting from the forum would be able to address the trade gap between NAM members and its combined market that constitutes three-quarters of the world's population.

Navaratnam shared views of some NAM delegates who feel that the Business Forum should be held regularly.