

12/08/2003

Dr Mahathir: Establish direct trade ties with Algeria

Carolyn Hong

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last night called on the private sector to be more aggressive in establishing profitable and direct trade ties with Algeria.

He said last year's bilateral trade figures of US\$100 million (RM380 million) were marginal and did not reflect the true potential of both countries.

"Direct trading should be encouraged rather than through a third country," he said at a state dinner hosted by Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika at Palais de la Culture.

Dr Mahathir said the potential sectors for further co-operation included information and communications technology, construction, education and tourism.

He noted that both countries' national oil companies, Petronas and Sonatrach, already have co-operation.

He also said Malaysia was ready to share its experience with Algeria in developing and managing its economy.

"To achieve economic development is not easy. Malaysia's own experience is not rosy. There are bound to be difficulties but these are not insurmountable.

"Hard work, determination and proper planning and determined execution are keys to achieve economic development."

The Prime Minister added that he hoped Algeria would benefit from a study undertaken by Malaysia's experts on the diversification of its economy.

Relations between Malaysia and Algeria, he said, had improved by leaps and bounds based on mutual respect and understanding.

"People-to-people contact is equally important and should be encouraged," he said, adding that the news exchange agreement to be signed between Bernama and Algerie Presse Service would help to generate better understanding.

Dr Mahathir said Algeria had tremendous potential in terms of its natural wealth and well-educated young people. Its economic reforms showed that it was determined to improve the well-being of its people.

Algeria's negotiations to join the World Trade Organisation and successful conclusion of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement with the European Union sent a clear message of Algeria's potential.

"The future of Algeria is very bright," he said.

He added that both Malaysia and Algeria had co-operated in various international fora, and thanked Bouteflika for the country's support during the Non-Aligned Movement summit hosted by Kuala Lumpur in February.

He expressed confidence that Malaysia would have Algeria's full participation in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference summit in October.

"Muslim countries must unite to defend our image. The perception of Islam as a religion that promotes acts of terror should be corrected.

"Both Malaysia and Algeria share a common position in the fight against terrorism," he said.

He added that Malaysia continued to hope for a return to the multilateral system in achieving world peace through the United Nations, especially in solving the problem in Iraq.

"Iraq is very likely to descend into anarchy unless the United Nations

takes full control. The Iraqis must regain their independence soonest," he said.