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PM: United NAM can have big say in WTO

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Non-Aligned Movement countries can be a force to be reckoned with in multi-lateral negotiations at the World Trade Organisation but they must be united, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

By working together, he said, the 83 NAM countries which are members of the WTO now could be an influential group in addressing issues so as to safeguard the interest of developing countries.

While trade liberalisation measures initiated by WTO and the advent of globalisation had opened up new markets, said Dr Mahathir, it had also intensified competition.

"No nation can be competitive in everything but through trade and investment collaboration, NAM member countries will be able to build on each other's strength to compete in the markets of the world," he said when opening the Showcase Malaysia 2003 and Malaysia Tourism Fair 2003 at Putra World Trade Centre.

Both events are organised in conjunction with the 13th Non-Aligned Movement Summit on Feb 20-25.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia saw the potential of NAM members contributing towards alleviating and mitigating any negative impact of globalisation, while working synergistically to benefit from the positive effects through economic activities.

He said the time had come for the private sector to assume a greater role in fostering co-operation within NAM through economic activities.

"Private sector-led initiative needs to be developed to set the momentum for growth in business."

The 114 countries of NAM, noted the Prime Minister, offered a large potential for trade and investments.

However, their contribution to global trade indicated that the potential had yet to be fully realised.

NAM member countries in 2001, said Dr Mahathir, accounted for US\$880.5 billion (RM3.35 trillion) or only 14.3 per cent of world exports and US\$736.9 billion or 11.4 per cent of world imports.

Taking into account the large membership of NAM, the present share of world trade was not significant, he said.

Hence, to accelerate the pace of growth in trade, member countries must intensify efforts to identify and develop new areas of economic cooperation. But the private sector, he said, must be innovative in capitalising on the opportunities.

"Apart from using conventional tools to establish trade links, it must be creative in exploring alternative arrangements like counter trade, contract manufacturing and joint venture investments to exploit the business potential within NAM member countries."

He said the organisation of trade missions and business visits to member countries could facilitate the building of stronger private sector linkages.

Packaged visits to member countries, meanwhile, could provide a better insight into a country's development, business environment as well as trade and investment potential.