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Speaking for Bosnia

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LISTENING to Selma Kalota speak enthusiastically about fostering better ties between Malaysia and her country Bosnia, you wouldn't think she was a product of war-torn Bosnia.

As the vivacious 27-year-old rambled on about world politics and world leaders, two names kept popping up - those of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

Clearly in awe of Dr Mahathir, she said he had a hand in the rebuilding of Bosnia. She thanked Dr Mahathir for instilling confidence in Bosnians to rebuild their lives.

"Because of him, other world leaders today have a different view of Bosnia," says Kalota, who was an interpreter at the recent Organisation of the Islamic Conference Summit here. She admits that she was so impressed by Dr Mahathir that she wrote a letter to world leaders asking them to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize. Speaking flawless English, Kalota was among a group of Bosnians sponsored by the Malaysian Government in 1993 under a student scheme to pursue their studies here. She was 18 then. Kalota, who hails from the south of the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, said she worked for the Red Cross before her trip here.

She praised the 10th OIC Summit and said that although the summit remains focused on strengthening Muslim unity, it has opened its doors to non-Muslim countries, citing the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was invited as an observer.

"This is indeed a healthy development," says Kalota, who also speaks Italian, Arabic, Spanish and Russian.

She is now the manager for research and market development at LimKokWing University of Creative Technology, which participated in the OIC Expo.

She said Bosnia can be a stepping stone for Malaysia to make inroads into markets in Europe, the Middle East and Russia.

Malaysia's relations with Bosnia should be extended to the corporate sector, she added. She hoped Malaysia would develop bilateral trade ties and invest in Bosnia's automotive industry, food processing and the agriculture sector.

She is confident that Bosnia will be able to join the European Union. She harbours political intentions and even says she might consider running for the office of President.

She attributed her political leanings to her father, a former Member of Parliament but who is now in business, while her mother works with the Ministry of Home Affairs. She has a brother who is studying international law at Sarajevo University.

Kalota is taken with Malaysia's greenery and beautiful beaches and has no immediate plans to return home although she visits Bosnia on business trips or when she is invited to act as an interpreter.

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