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( PRIME MINISTER )

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PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE

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TIME:

Thank you, Mr. President, for your warm words of welcome. I am indeed honoured to be here and at this gracious occasion this evening. I am truly delighted that I have been able to undertake my first official visit to your beautiful country. More so as I am the first Malaysian Prime Minister ever to visit Ukraine.

2. On behalf of my wife, my delegation and on my own behalf, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you, Mr. President, and Madam Kuchma, your Government and the People of Ukraine, for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements accorded to us since our arrival. We have been hugely impressed by the artistry of your fine architecture and the wealth of your traditions and culture.

3. Ukraine is an extraordinary country. Your strength lies in your extraordinary people whose skills, talents and resourcefulness in fields such as science, medicine and aviation are the envy of many. Your country in the decade of your independence has been a symbol of courage, Ukraine can stand tall and proud as you have freed yourself from communism and embraced a democratic free market system. The path to economic development is never easy or smooth but you have endeavoured to introduce reforms. Your economy is now growing and your determination to meet the challenges head-on has allowed you to enjoy the benefits of your forward looking policies.

4. My visit here today is a testament to the strength of our relationship characterised by warmth and friendship since diplomatic ties were established in 1991.

5. Our bilateral ties premised on mutual respect and understanding has seen remarkable progress since the establishment of your Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. Trade has shown positive trends although I believe that we have yet to realise our full potential. It is for this reason that I included a significant number of businessmen in my delegation. I hope that they will be

able to use the opportunities provided through their visit here to build personal relationships - so crucial to business success.

6. I urge Malaysian and Ukrainian businessmen to promote their respective companies and products through participation in trade fairs and exhibitions to exchange ideas through dialogue and seminars. I am particularly hopeful that Ukraine can provide a distribution centre for Malaysian palm oil and other products. Ukraine's strategic position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia make that prospect very attractive.

7. Through Malaysia, Ukraine has a gateway to the other ASEAN nations and by extension the rest of East Asia. Furthermore, with the realisation of AFTA in 2004, a market of over 500 million is open to you through Malaysia. We are Ukraine's logical springboard for the region.

8. I am deeply grateful to Ukraine for opening their academic doors to Malaysian students. There are a large and increasing number of Malaysian students pursuing their studies in varied fields such as medicine and engineering. The Crimea alone is home to more than 500 medical students. Students are more often than not effective ambassadors. They portray the rich diversity of our multiracial, multi religious heritage which is the strength of Malaysia. Ukrainian students too are welcome to pursue their studies in Malaysia. As a centre for excellence, Malaysia can offer interesting courses that can help bring about greater understanding of our different cultures and religions and the common threads that bind us.

9. Allow me once again, to reiterate my heartfelt thanks to you, Mr. President, for the hearty welcome and the generous hospitality extended to my wife, members of my delegation and to me.