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Malaysia's racial diversity an economic asset: Koh

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia can use its multi-racial cultural and social connections as an asset for economic relationships and developments, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Senator Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, said yesterday.

Koh said the diversity of religions and cultures in the context of a largely peaceful and harmonious social environment has been perceived and promoted as a major asset rather than a liability.

He said the three main races comprising Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia could play their roles to explore business opportunities in the overseas market.

Explaining further, Koh said the Chinese community in Malaysia has been encouraged to use their linguistic capability and cultural affiliations to help

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Senator Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

the country in gaining access to China's huge market.

Malay and Muslim businessmen and professionals have been exploring economic collaborations and other potential ventures with Islamic countries while Indian Malaysians could work on relationships with India and the global Indian diaspora, he said.

"There are many Malaysians overseas, either studying, working or residing, and they have expertise and experience," Koh told reporters after officiating the World Chinese Economic Forum (WCEF) held here.

"They can work together among themselves and also

network with the Muslim, Chinese and Indian diaspora in their respective countries to bring development to Malaysia," he said.

According to Koh, it is vital for Malaysia to embrace China and India as strategic partners in Asia.

"I believe that the 21st century will develop into an Asian century with China and India playing key and significant roles in shaping the future of Asia," he said.

Koh said the inaugural WCEF was timely as it came right after the historic visit by China's President Hu Jintao to Malaysia and the fruitful conclusion of the Apec meetings in Singapore.

The forum with the theme, "Building Business Linkages, Charting New

Frontiers", will present new perspectives and creative strategies to harness the potential of China as a rising economic powerhouse.

It also aimed harness the network of Chinese communities throughout the world, commonly known as the Chinese diaspora, to explore, exploit and enhance economic potential for the benefit of all nations.

The WCEF is jointly organised by Country Heights Holdings Bhd, Easy Pha-max and the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli).

Malaysia-China bilateral trade exceeded US\$53.4 billion last year, meeting the US\$50.0 billion target for 2010 two years ahead of schedule. — Bernama