

Rubber: Dr Msets target

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Malaysia hopes to emerge as one of the world leaders in the export of manufactured natural rubber products by the end of the Eighties.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia had served the world well as the largest producer of natural rubber although this role did not fulfil the nation's aspirations for the Eighties.

He said: "Just as today we are the world's largest exporter of natural rubber, it is our aspiration that by the end of the decade this country will also become one of the world

leaders in the export of manufactured natural rubber products."

He said Malaysia also hoped to become one of the largest exporters of dipped rubber gloves within the next two years.

He added that of late, Malaysia had managed to persuade a few of the international giants involved in dipped rubber goods to set up manufacturing operations here.

The Deputy Prime Minister was addressing the International Seminar on Investment Opportunities in the Rubber-based Industries in Malaysia organised by the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority.

"It was the determination of the Government and the dedication of the people of this country that has moved Malaysia forward to where our jungles have been transformed into huge rubber plantations, despite the fact that the tree is not indigenous to Malaysia," he said.

"It is this same determination of the Government and the dedication of the Malaysian people that we feel will make Malaysia a leader in rubber products manufacturing.

"We have had obstacles in the past, both man-made and natural, that have threatened to slow down the growth of the rubber plantation industry.

Earnings

"However, all these have been overcome."

Last year, Malaysian manufacturers consumed only 40,000 tons or three per cent of the country's total prod-

uction of rubber.

In the same year, export earnings from manufactured rubber products brought \$76 million in revenue — only 1.6 per cent of total earnings from the exports of manufactured products which totalled \$4,790 million.

He said the rubber products industry in Malaysia was characterised by relatively low capital investment.

Although there were about 130 rubber products manufacturers and more than 150 tyre retreaders in the country, these were primarily small enterprises.

Only about one-third of such manufacturers had capital of more than \$1 million.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir said the Government approved 28 rubber products manufacturing projects with a total capital investment exceeding \$67 million last year.

These projects were expected to provide em-