

Dr M: Malaysia and Caribbean

From Fauzi Omar

CASTRIES (St Lucia), Tues. — Distance should not be allowed to stand in the way of efforts to develop a mutually beneficial two-way trade and communication between the Caribbean countries and Malaysia, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said this to 50 St Lucian businessmen at a luncheon hosted for him at the Royal St Lucian hotel here.

"St Lucia is not far from Malaysia. Flying time is

only slightly more than 24 hours. We are looking forward to having close relations with St Lucia. We hope there will be exchanges of visits between the two countries and as a result we will be able to learn from each other and develop together," he said.

Also present at the luncheon were St Lucian Prime Minister John Compton and the Prime Minister of Grenada Nicholas Braithwaite.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was not only looking at what it could sell here but also what it could buy from this region. He hoped two-

way trade and communication between the two countries would increase.

He told the businessmen that Malaysia had a policy of making friends not only with those who were powerful but with everyone.

"You never know when friends can come in handy. But whether they do come in handy or not I think it's a good thing to be friends," he said.

To demonstrate Malaysia's policy of making friends with other countries regardless of the distance, Dr Mahathir spoke of how Malaysia had taken the

trouble to get close to Latin American countries although South America was far from Malaysia.

"Malaysia and Latin America are separated by the biggest ocean in the world the Pacific Ocean. But because we make a deliberate effort to come close to them, we feel they are very close to us now.

"Through such close relations, we have been able to increase our trade with them and I think they too benefit from the trade," he said.

On relations with St Lucia, the Prime Minister said

Malaysia could learn about growing bananas and promoting the tourism industry from the country. There were also things that St Lucia could learn from Malaysia.

"Maybe you would like to come to Malaysia to see how we do things over there. We should not be thinking of ourselves as being very far from each other. We are actually very close," he said.

He added Malaysia deliberately made it a point to cultivate friendship with all the countries particularly with those from the South.

"We of course have our

States are 'close'

traditional trading partners like the Europeans, the North Americans and the Japanese but we want to be less dependent on the developed countries.

"Obviously, a lot of the countries in the North have benefitted from trading and investing in the South but that does not mean countries in the South should not do the same and benefit as well. We are exploring all these things," he said.

He said from a country generally concentrating on agriculture, Malaysia transformed itself into a country manufacturing finished

products with the help of foreign technology.

"It was easier to invite foreigners with the technology, the know-how as well as the capital to come to Malaysia and start their industries.

"They have done this and pumped in a lot of money into the economy. In 1990 alone, total investment from foreign sources amounted to about US\$15 billion.

"So you can see that by opening up and not closing your country to other people, you can really benefit." Dr Mahathir began the sec-

ond day of his official visit to St Lucia by calling on acting Governor-General Francis James and Mrs Lucille James at the Government House here. He was accompanied by Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

Later Dr Mahathir held talks with his St Lucian counterpart Mr Compton. He was then taken for a tour of the Rodney Bay Marina Development.

He also visited the Winbam Research Centre. In the evening, the Malaysian entourage attended a reception given by Mr James.