

Rope in locals, Koreans told

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday called on South Korean companies to set up "sincere and meaningful" partnerships with their Malaysian counterparts.

Such co-operation could help the country achieve its aspiration to be a progressive and industrialised society, he said.

He said he was disappointed with the level of Korean investment in Malaysia, which was less than that by Japan, Britain and Taiwan.

"After numerous trade promotion efforts in Korea by the Government, only a small number of investors has come to this country," he said.

He said while the bigger organisations had come to bid for contracts and, in some instances received government support, they departed on completion of the projects.

"I must say the bilateral interaction in investments between Korea and Malaysia has been disappointing," he said.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the signing ceremony of the national commercial vehicle project yesterday.

The project will be a joint-venture between Hyundai Motor Company and Industri Otomotif Komersial (M) Sdn Bhd (Inokom).

Dr Mahathir said the project would see a commitment by one of South Korea's largest *chaebol* business groups to invest and provide technical knowledge to its Malaysian partners.

He said the move reflected a better understanding of the nation's investment climate by South Koreans.

"I hope this (joint-venture) will be the forerunner to further investments by the big *chaebols*," he said.

"We have a strong and big heart, determination, aspirations, pragmatic ideas and are highly sensitive to business needs."

He also said Malaysia re-

quired more investment in high technology to utilise its workforce more efficiently.

"The days of screwdriver and spot weld assembly of vehicles, which have been around this country for more than 30 years, are almost over.

"While they were useful for job creation, they carry a high cost for Malaysian consumers and do not contribute towards technology upgrading or true

industrialisation," he said.

Dr Mahathir urged investors to assist the manufacturers of car components in research and development as this would ensure quality, hence competitiveness.

He said the Proton project had spawned a viable components industry, which should be augmented by the Malaysian mini-car and the commercial vehicle project.

"The volume of motor vehi-

cles produced in this country will be sufficiently big to justify investments in more expensive components, and Malaysia can aspire to be a centre for components manufacture," he said.

Later, Dr Mahathir received a cheque for RM200,000 from Hyundai Business Group chairman Chung Se Yung as a donation to the Tunku Abdul Rahman Memorial fund.