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Check your Malaysian partners (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has advised developing countries to verify with the respective Malaysian embassies or missions before they seek the services of Malaysian companies.

This was to avoid cases of Malaysian companies which secured projects abroad or had entered into memoranda of understanding but failed to implement them.

Besides verifying that these Malaysian companies were bona fide, the move was also to determine whether they have the capability and intention to implement the projects.

There have been companies which won projects in certain countries that tried to "sell" them to other companies in Malaysia for a premium.

Dr Mahathir said this to Mozambique President Joaquim Alberto Chissano during talks held at the Prime Minister's Department today.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who briefed reporters on the outcome of the meeting, said this was the first time that Dr Mahathir had explained the matter during his discussions with a leader of a foreign country.

Chissano arrived yesterday with a 34-member delegation for a four-day official visit to Malaysia.

Abdullah did not disclose the errant companies or the countries where they had secured the projects but failed to implement them.

"Dr Mahathir viewed the matter seriously as this affects Malaysia's image and economic ties with friendly countries," he said.

The Foreign Minister said he would direct Malaysian embassies and high commissions to request the host Governments to determine the capabilities and status of the Malaysian companies which undertook these projects.

As in Mozambique's case, Dr Mahathir informed Chissano that his Government should contact the Malaysian Embassy in Harare, Zimbabwe, since Malaysia does not have an embassy in Mozambique, or liaise directly with Kuala Lumpur to obtain information on Malaysian companies bidding for projects.

"This is to curb Malaysian businessmen from taking advantage of investment opportunities in Mozambique by making promises and proposals but with no intention of executing them," he said.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir regarded such exploitation as unhealthy because Malaysia wanted to be a partner in the development of a friendly nation.

"We must recommend credible companies which can implement proposed projects on time and within the stipulated time," he said. "The Prime Minister wants only companies which have the capability, expertise and genuine intention to implement projects."

Other matters discussed between Dr Mahathir and Chissano were:

- * Mozambique's desire to emulate Malaysia's development strategies in providing jobs, trading and economic activities to its indigenous but backward people;

- * Seeking Malaysia's help to develop and expand Mozambique's padi cultivation and also improve its rail service and ports;

- * Seeking Malaysia's assistance and co-operation to develop its agriculture and infrastructure besides exploiting its economic resources like oil, timber and coal; and,

* Developing Mozambique's power generation capabilities, especially in hydro-electricity.

Dr Mahathir gave an immediate assurance that Malaysia would train Mozambique officers under the Malaysia Technical Co-operation Programme.

Earlier, Chissano was accorded an official welcome at Parliament Square. He was greeted on arrival at the square by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah.

Also present were Dr Mahathir and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

The national anthems of Malaysia and Mozambique were played amidst a 21-gun salute by the 41st Ceremonial Artillery Battery.

Chissano later inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by four officers and 104 men of the First Battalion of the Royal Malay Regiment led by Mejar Rafizi Sharif.

He was later introduced to Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers and members of the diplomatic corps.

Chissano was accompanied by his wife Marcelina Rafael Chissano at the ceremony.

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