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Investors will go to Malawi if `conditions right`

Azmi M. Anshar in Blantyre (Malawi)

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Malawi Government may decide on how soon Malaysian investments can proceed, but it is the investors themselves who have to make the final move.

"If the conditions are right, investors will come," the Prime Minister told a news conference for Malaysian and Malawian reporters at Sanjika Palace yesterday.

Also present were Malawian President Dr Bakili Muluzi and Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie.

"If we feel welcomed, and we do feel welcomed," he added, "we will move as quickly as possible."

A Malawian reporter had asked the time frame and conditions required by Malaysian investors to proceed with projects to build, among other things, a hotel and undertake a housing scheme, a commercial centre and cellular phone service.

On whether Malaysian investors were willing to invest in rural areas, Dr Mahathir, who is on a three-day official visit, said they would if it was viable.

He said he would ask the Malaysian Agriculture Research and Development Institute to study how best it could help improve Malawian rural income and maximise resources.

The Malaysian private sector, he said, will try to bid for as many projects as possible under the Malawian privatisation scheme worth US\$160 million (RM400 million) or others that were feasible.

"But we do not want to give the impression that we want to monopolise everything. This is a sensitive issue. Some might think we want to hog everything when that is not our intention."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysian investors had identified tourism, infrastructure, banking, mining and plantations as potential investment areas, particularly labour intensive industries where Malawian goods could be produced for export to get the needed foreign exchange.

When asked what was his secret behind Malaysia's success story, Dr Mahathir said he was lucky as the three Prime Ministers before him "had an economic development theme".

"Initially I inherited this theme but it was the people who lent themselves to make the rapid growth," he said. "We also adopted policies which were a lot more innovative to stimulate growth."

Dr Mahathir said a strong Cabinet team which "do not quarrel among themselves" was also another ingredient in Malaysia's success.

"The fact that the Malaysian political stability, determined by a huge majority for the ruling party, also helped," he said.

At this juncture, Muluzi chipped in to say he had learnt from his visit to Malaysia last year that Malaysia's success stemmed from three principles.

"They have political stability, an efficient civil service and a private sector which supports Government policies," Muluzi said.

On whether Malaysia intended to set up a mission in Malawi, Dr Mahathir said its representative from neighbouring Harare in Zimbabwe could cover diplomatic issues in Malawi.

"It is expensive to set up diplomatic missions even when we have expanded by one-third over a short period in Africa, Latin America and Central Asia," he said. "It strains our resources a bit but when the right

time comes, we will set up a mission."
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