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Mahathir-Malawi

MAHATHIR ENDS SUCCESSFUL VISIT TO MALAWI

By: E.Sivabalan

BLANTYRE (MALAWI), May 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad concluded his three-day "landmark" visit to the Republic of Malawi today, saying he was glad in deciding to visit this southern African nation.

Expressing his happiness to be in Malawi which he described as "a really very beautiful country that is worth fighting or dying for", Dr Mahathir said he had a fair idea now on how Malaysia could cooperate in the development of that country.

He also found out that negative stories told to him earlier by some Malaysians who had visited Malawi were incorrect.

Speaking at a joint news conference with Malawian President Dr Bakili Muluzi at the Sanjika Palace, the presidential office, here last night, he said new areas for cooperation had already been identified by the private sector of the two countries.

Banking, mining, plantation and tourism were among possible areas of cooperation, said Dr Mahathir who arrived in this commercial city of Malawi last Thursday.

Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and a business delegation led by Arab-Malaysia Group chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim, said Malaysian businessmen could also invest in labour intensive industries here.

To help Malawi in its development programmes, he said the Malaysian government would get labour intensive industries in Malaysia to relocate their business here to create reasonable incomes for the Malawian workforce.

About 85 per cent of Malawi's nearly 11 million population works in the subsistence sector, engaging mainly in smallholder farming, including a variable proportion of cash crops.

Dr Mahathir said shifting the industries to this republic would be economical and beneficial to all parties.

"There will be spin-off where more jobs will be created," he said, adding that if the conditions were right, the industries would come in "as quickly as possible".

At this juncture, Dr Muluzi said that his government would want to see these industries to be relocated in Malawi.

Dr Mahathir also stressed that Malaysian businessmen in Malawi were not out to reap profits only but also contribute to the economic development of Malawi.

Asked by a Malawian journalist if Malaysian companies were prepared to invest in rural areas in Malawi, the Prime Minister said: "We are prepared if it is viable."

He said the Malaysian Agricultural and Research Development Institute (Mardi) officials were in Malawi to show the rural folks on how they could maximise their resources.

Dr Mahathir also said the Malaysian government had no plans to get labour supply from Malawi because there were already too many foreigners working illegally in Malaysia.

Asked if Malaysia would set up its mission here, Dr Mahathir said that due to financial constraint, the move was unlikely "but if the time comes, we will."

Malaysian interest in Malawi is currently under the care of the

Malaysian embassy in Zimbabwe.

Dr Muluzi, who made his opening remarks at the start of the packed news conference, hoped that Malawian and Malaysian officials would sit down to finalise the agreements reached at the bilateral delegation meeting earlier today.

During his visit here, Dr Mahathir held talks with Dr Muluzi and the representatives of the Muslim community.

The Prime Minister also performed the ground-breaking ceremony of the Blantyre City Centre Hotel, a joint venture project between Malaysian-based G-Two Holdings Berhad and the Malawi Development Corporation.

He also delivered his address at the Malawi-Malaysia Business Meeting and later toured the Telekom Networks Limited headquarters with Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie.

Dr Mahathir and his entourage will leave for Botswana later today as part of his week-long tour to three African nations.

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