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Mahathir-Africa (Wrap up)

MAHATHIR RAPS UP SUCCESSFUL VISIT TO SOUTHERN AFRICA

By: E.Sivabalan

CAPE TOWN, May 8 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's mission "to seek new friends in Africa", in Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's own words, has been accomplished.

His week-long mission to three southern African countries which ended yesterday not only left behind a trail of possibly millions or even billions of ringgit worth of Malaysian investments but also something beyond the area of business.

It has allowed Malaysia to cater to the nation-building needs of the three countries as well and that was the main purpose, probably the only purpose of Dr Mahathir's visit.

Indeed, the Prime Minister's visits to the republics of Malawi, Botswana and South Africa have brought the "distance" between Malaysia and these countries much closer.

It has also increased the understanding about each other's potentials and resources, paving the way for more business opportunities between the private sectors.

Leading a high-powered delegation which included Arab-Malaysia Group chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim, the Prime Minister travelled hundreds and sometimes thousands of kilometres from one country to another to woo local businessmen to form partnerships with Malaysian investors.

In Malawi, the presence of Dr Mahathir at a business forum laid the beginning of a new era for business collaboration between Malaysian and Malawian businessmen with the signing of an agreement to build highways and upgrade existing roads.

G-Two Holdings Berhad, the Malaysian company which will undertake the mammoth project, will also build a RM70 million international standard hotel and a RM3 billion new satellite township in Blantyre, Malawi.

Telekom Malaysia Berhad is the other major Malaysian company which has set foot in Malawi through its joint venture with the Malawi Post and Telecommunication Corporation in Telekom Network Limited.

And with the Prime Minister's visit to the republic, more Malaysian companies are to follow suit. YTL Corporation Berhad is likely to be one of them.

Its managing director Datuk Francis Yeoh Sock Ping who was in Dr Mahathir's business delegation told Bernama that YTL would embark on a housing project in the republic which had a population of nearly 11 million.

From Malawi, Dr Mahathir headed for Botswana where immediately upon arrival he met the local businessmen who had eagerly awaited his speech.

"Let me begin by saying how happy I am to be here in Gaborone (the capital of Botswana) today," was Dr Mahathir's opening remarks to them.

Although there were no agreements signed between the two countries during Dr Mahathir's visit to Botswana, the business delegation which accompanied the Prime Minister took the opportunity to scout for possible joint ventures with their local counterparts.

Dr Mahathir also took centre stage at the first Southern Africa International Dialogue where he delivered a special address to the 12 African leaders in Kasane, about 1,300km from Gaborone.

The Prime Minister spoke on the need for the southern African sub-region to form a smart partnership to face the challenges of globalisation. The Malaysian leader, who was the only non-African leader to

attend the meeting, was also asked to share his views on Malaysia's success story.

It was in South Africa where the Prime Minister was honoured for his "exceptional and invaluable contribution" to the promotion of friendly and mutually beneficial relations between the republic and Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir was described as the "source of inspiration to the developing world" through his eminent leadership in the United Nations, Non-Aligned Movement and other international fora.

As a small boy he used to sell cakes and ginger tea in the small town of Pekan Rabu in Kedah, Prime Minister Dr Mahathir is now selling Malaysia and its entrepreneurs to the whole world. --BERNAMA

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