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Malaysia offers to help Mongolia boost tourism

Rose Ismail in Ulan Bator, Mongolia

MALAYSIA is willing to work with Mongolia to overcome obstacles which are giving tourists, from Southeast Asia especially, the impression that this north Asian country is remote, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said Mongolia only needed some investments in facilities to make it attractive and accessible.

Dr Mahathir, on the fourth and final day of his official visit to Mongolia, said that with its pristine beauty, clean air, glorious history and the relics of the past, Mongolia would make a great destination for tourists.

Yet, he noted, most people in Southeast Asia perceived Mongolia as distant and inaccessible.

"It is time to revise our perceptions. It only took seven hours to fly here. It takes 13 hours to fly non-stop to London and more than 20 hours to New York. Yet, those places are not regarded as remote."

That he is the first Malaysian and Asean leader to visit Mongolia and also the first world leader to head such a large delegation of businessmen to Mongolia to explore ways to improve bilateral relations between the two countries bears testimony to this fact.

Dr Mahathir said this at a ceremony where he was conferred an honorary doctorate of humanity at the National University of Mongolia this morning.

Dr Mahathir then reiterated his earlier call to Mongolia that it should work closely with other countries of the South.

He said as the world entered the next millennium all developing countries should "unite and speak with one voice to ensure that our interests are promoted and views duly respected".

It was imperative, he stressed, for countries of the South to intensify co-operation for their mutual benefits.

"Countries of the South, in their efforts to develop their economies, will find their path fraught with difficulties including those imposed by external pressures.

"We in the East Asian region are only too aware of these attempts by outside forces to slow down our rapid economic growth as demonstrated by the recent attempts to destabilise and weaken certain East Asian currencies."

Until and unless developing countries resisted the manipulation by these external forces, Dr Mahathir said, "we will not be able to achieve the full potential of our countries".

In his remarks, the university rector, Sh. Gantsog, said that Mongolians knew Dr Mahathir as an outstanding world politician who had pushed for greater co-operation among countries and contributed significantly to the advancement of science, culture and education. He said Mongolia also greatly appreciated Dr Mahathir's willingness to consider education as a priority issue in the development of Mongolia-Malaysia relations.

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