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PM hopes more Malaysian firms will invest in Mongolia

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ULAANBAATAR (Mongolia), Mon: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad identified six areas where Malaysians could invest in Mongolia, just hours after touching down here for the first visit of this country by a Malaysian prime minister.

Speaking at a dinner held in his honour by Mongolian Prime Minister M. Enkhsaikhan tonight, Dr Mahathir said he will encourage Malaysian businessmen to look into investment opportunities in Mongolia.

The areas he identified are tourism, transportation, telecommunications, mining, housing and infrastructure construction.

He noted that several Malaysian companies are already investing in a modest way in Mongolia and hoped that many more will follow suit soon. One such company is Sriwani Sdn Bhd. Dr Mahathir is scheduled to open the MM-Sriwani duty-free shop at the Buyant Ukhua International Airport here tomorrow.

The Prime Minister arrived here in the afternoon for a four-day official visit. He is accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, seven Cabinet ministers, a chief minister, a deputy minister and a 66-member business delegation.

He expressed hope that collaboration at the private sector level will be intensified. "Being the engine of growth, the private sector has a critical role to play in expanding the economic aspects of our bilateral relations.

"I am optimistic that the contacts that they (Malaysian businessmen) make with Mongolian businessmen and entrepreneurs within the next few days will result in concrete business arrangements," he added.

Dr Mahathir hoped his first visit to Mongolia will provide another impetus to bring the two countries closer together. The visit also coincides with the 26th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In his address, the Prime Minister expressed Malaysia's support for Mongolia to integrate with Asia-Pacific and South-East Asian countries. He noted that Mongolia is embarking on efforts to promote foreign direct investment and privatization through the provision of greater incentives and favourable investment climate.

"Any attempt to isolate, contain or ostracise any country from playing its rightful role in the region's political and economic life is tantamount to sowing the seeds of discontentment and instability," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the region's rapid economic development makes it not only an important market for Mongolian products but also a rich source of investment for Mongolia.

"I am confident that Mongolia's desire will be warmly reciprocated by the countries of the region," he said.

He said besides the immediate economic benefits, closer relations between all countries of the Asia-Pacific region - large and small, rich and poor - provides the only guarantee for genuine peace and stability for the region.

Dr Mahathir said Mongolia has, within a relatively short period since the introduction of political and economic reforms, made significant progress.

This, he added, reflects well on the ability and determination of the

Mongolian people to overcome the challenges facing the country. "I am so happy to be here to see for myself the changes brought about by the economic and political reforms introduced by your Government and its predecessor."

Dr Mahathir and Enkhsaikhan will hold bilateral talks tomorrow and witness the signing of an air services agreement, an agreement on economic, scientific, educational, technical and cultural cooperation, and a memorandum of understanding on scientific and technical cooperation on palm oil application in Mongolia.

He will also deliver a keynote address at a business luncheon jointly hosted by the Mongolian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Malaysian business delegation.

The Prime Minister will attend a reception to commemorate the 26th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Mongolia hosted by Malaysian Ambassador to Mongolia, Datuk Omardin Abdul Wahab.

On Wednesday, Dr Mahathir will visit the Chinggis Khaan Khuree resort where the prime minister and delegation members will be entertained by traditional Mongolian sporting events such as wrestling, archery, horse riding and exhibits of various tribal activities.

He will be presented a Mongolian horse by Enkhsaikhan and the Mongolian traditional bow and arrow by the resort founder and president of Tsagaan Shonkhor Holdings Ltd, Mr Ch Enkhtaivan.

On Thursday before leaving Mongolia for a three-day working visit to Kyrgyzstan, Dr Mahathir will be conferred an honorary doctorate by the National University of Mongolia.

Businessmen accompanying Dr Mahathir, led by Malaysia Mining Corp chief executive Tan Sri Ibrahim Menudin, include Malaysian Resources Corp Bhd executive chairman Datuk Khalid Ahmad, Telekom Malaysia chief executive Datuk Mohamed Said Mohamed Ali, Edaran Otomobil Nasional Bhd managing director Datuk Adzmi Wahab, Business Focus executive chairman Datuk Amin Shah Omar Shah, KUB Malaysia chairman and chief executive officer Datuk Hassan Harun and Mara Holding Sdn bhd executive chairman Datuk Mohd Nadzmi Mohd Salleh.

Also in his delegation are Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik, Agriculture Minister Datuk Dr Sulaiman Daud and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Chong Kah Kiat.

Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Abu Zahar Ithnin and newly-appointed Deputy Primary Industries Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein are also in the delegation.

Dr Mahathir's visit had been planned for last year but the trip was postponed due to the local elections.

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