

Taking a leaf from Malaysia

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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his three-day visit to Mozambique that began on July 29, has impressed a lot of people in the former war-torn Marxist-Leninist state, including its president. The Southern African state, stressing on reconstructing its economy, seems to view Malaysia as one of its development models. WAN HAMIDIHAMID writes.

IS the capital city of Mozambique, roads and streets are named after communist and African nationalist leaders.

Thus, avenues in Maputo have names such as Karl Marx, Ho Chin Minh, Mao Tse Tung, Julius Nyerere and Eduardo Mondlane, founder of the National Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo).

But they seemed to be the only remnants of communism in a Southern African country that has been ravaged by almost 15 years of civil war after gaining independence from Portugal in 1975.

Frelimo had dropped its communist tag in 1989, long before peace was achieved in 1992 when the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo), then backed by the apartheid South African and white Rhodesian governments, agreed to abandon its armed struggle.

When a democratic multi-party

election supervised by the United Nations was held in 1994. Frelimo and its leader Joaquim Chissano won the party and presidential election, respectively, while Renamo is now the main opposition party among the 70 parties in Mozambique.

Eager to improve the economy, Chissano embarked on strategies similar to what Malaysia had done in the early 1980s, focusing on privatisation and inviting foreign investments.

During Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's three-day official visit to Mozambique, the Prime Minister was initially scheduled for a tour of the city on the last day of his visit on Friday (July 31).

However, the plan was changed when his Mozambican counterpart decided to ask the Prime Minister to give a talk to his cabinet ministers instead.

Chissano, who had earlier invited

Renamo politicians to attend a state banquet for Dr Mahathir, seemed eager to let his ministers learn from Malaysia on its success and perseverance during the current economic turmoil in East Asia and South-East Asia.

Dr Mahathir did not fail the Mozambicans. His tribute to their

leaders such as Mondlane and his successor Samora Machel, who died in a plane crash in 1986, is aimed at rekindling the spirit of cooperation between South-South countries.

"Malaysia and Mozambique are both members of the Commonwealth. We both subscribe to the free market system and somehow we both share a common historical background.

uation then with the famine and civil war in Sudan at the moment.

"That is why peace is very precious and we must do what we can to reconstruct the country," he said.

After a peace agreement was signed in Rome between Chissano and Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama, a cease-fire was declared, but it was not until 1994 that a fair multi-party election was held.

“The Portuguese conquered Malacca on the pretext of searching for spices. And it was said that gold had attracted the Portuguese to Mozambique.

“Our wealth may have been the primary cause, but the extension of European politics also played a considerable role,” he said during a luncheon talk hosted by Petronas in Maputo.

Colonised in 1506, a virtual state of slavery and massacre existed until the 1960s when Mozambicans in exile set up liberation movements, including Frelimo which was formed in 1962.

Frelimo organised communal villages, with collective farms and primary health care, laying the foundation of socialism.

In 1974, the Portuguese government of Marcelo Caetano fell after a humiliating defeat in its war against the people of Mozambique and Angola.

However, not to be outdone, the Portuguese gave up Mozambique after more than 90% of its settlers fled the country.

As Frelimo declared Mozambique to be a communist state in 1977 with the support of the then Soviet Union, the apartheid regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia assisted the formation of Renamo to disrupt the government.

Renamo launched attacks on civilian areas, and with drought, led to a widespread famine and the Frelimo government was forced to appeal for international aid.

Chissano was appointed president after Machel's death. But it was a time when food and clothing were in short supply, a quarter of population was displaced, and foreign aid agencies, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, became involved in Mozambique's emergency.

In July 1989, the Frelimo party congress abandoned Marxism-Leninism and, a year later, direct talks were held between the government and Renamo. Towards the end of 1990, a new constitution was adopted, allowing for a multi-party state with periodic elections, and guaranteeing democratic rights.

During the 1992 drought, the government and Renamo agreed on principle to work for humanitarian assistance, pledging security for relief operations.

A local journalist likened the sit-

However, the civil war had cost Mozambique over US\$8bil, more than its debt which it could no longer repay, said a foreign aid agency report.

The IMF structural adjustment programme had obliged Mozambique to concentrate on the export of cash crops, reduce expenditure on social services and sell state assets to foreign interests.

With this situation at hand, Chissano is now going all out to promote his country, seeking investments from everywhere, including Malaysia.

As Dr Mahathir said: “Our two countries are in the process of reconstruction; Mozambique from the ravages of war and Malaysia from the devastation caused by unprecedented assault on our economy.

“We may be temporarily down, but we are certainly not out. Even weak countries working together can bolster each other's strength.”

It was such a stand that won Dr Mahathir admiration from leaders and people of the poor and developing nations.

At the dinner hosted by Banco Astral, now owned by Southern Bank, on Thursday night, Chissano said: “I admire Dr Mahathir because he had persuaded the business people to follow him here, not to make money or profits, but in the spirit of helping.

“This kind of help will help Mozambicans to help themselves.”

Local businessmen look forward to do some deals with Malaysians, although there had been fly-by-night operators, putting their faith in the words of Dr Mahathir.

“Your Prime Minister is brave enough to say what is true without mincing his words. I just hope that Malaysian businessmen have the same spirit,” said a director of an import-export company in Maputo.

The proof became apparent a couple of days ago when two Malaysian companies formed a consortium to develop a new township in Maputo.

Mozambique, as a journalist put it, should understand smart partnership better.

“As a former communist regime, smart partnership can now be seen as dynamic socialism,” he said with a smile, adding that free market, through cooperation of South-South countries, would be the best solution to avoid neo-colonialism from the West.