

# PM pledges strong ties with **S. Africa**

S 25 - 7 - 98

By M. VEERAPANDIYAN

PRETORIA: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad opened the new Malaysian High Commission building here yesterday with a pledge that the country will always accord the highest priority to its relations with South Africa.

The Prime Minister said the new 4.5mil rand (RM3.3mil) chancery building symbolised Malaysia's commitment to and friendship with South Africa.

"It is a country that Malaysians feel considerable affinity for. It must be the friendly people, warm hospitality and marvellous weather.

"I am happy to note the great strides that have been made in a relatively short period since the birth of the new South Africa," he said at the opening ceremony.

Also present were South African Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo and Malaysian High Commissioner to the republic Datuk Abdul Kadir Deen.

Dr Mahathir said South Africans had shown much fortitude in building a new society free from the terrible legacy of the apartheid era.

Both countries were also being drawn closer because of new economic

conditions.

Nzo said Malaysia had been very supportive of South Africa during its struggle in the apartheid era and under the present government.

He said Malaysian investors had continued to invest in South Africa despite Malaysia's economic woes.

Like the ringgit and other Asian currencies, the South African rand had also depreciated as a result of speculative attacks.

The exchange rate now

is four rand to US\$1. It was three rand before May.

The usually pro-Western South African media has recently been critical of currency speculations and has been calling for more transparency in hedge fund movements, echoing Dr Mahathir's sentiments.

The Prime Minister is on a two-day working visit here en route to Namibia for the Southern Africa International Dialogue and a state visit to Mozambique.

Later yesterday, he met Acting President Thabo Mbeki at the State Guest House here and launched the Pecanwood Resort and Residential Estate at Hartbeespoort, a joint venture between Country Heights and Maccon Investments of South Africa.

Dr Mahathir was also the guest of honour at the Malaysian Food and Cultural Fest at Sandton Hilton-hotel here last night to promote the 16th Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur in September.