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Dr M: South-South co-operation is still vital

Ahmad A. Talib in Maputo (Mozambique)

MALAYSIA is still determined to invest in Mozambique even if some of its proposed investments has been affected by the forced depreciation of the ringgit, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, adding that Malaysia was still trying to find ways to do so in the future.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here yesterday for a three-day official visit, said: "We are not about to give up. We still feel a need to co-operate with the countries of the South.

"We may not be able to do much presently but we will continue to look to the day when we can once again co-operate and invest in foreign countries."

The Prime Minister said this at a State Banquet hosted by President Joaquim Alberto Chissano last night. Dr Mahathir had earlier held bilateral talks with Chissano, who was also present at the Southern Africa International Dialogue in Namibia.

Dr Mahathir is on his last leg of a three-nation tour which started with South Africa on July 24. He then flew to Swakopmund, Namibia, for the second SAID.

He was met on arrival in Maputo by Chissano and his wife Marcelina Rafael Chissano.

Dr Mahathir is accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Leo Michael Toyad, several MPs and a delegation of business leaders.

He is the first Malaysian Prime Minister to make an official visit to Mozambique, a former Portugese colony which gained independence in 1975.

Dr Mahathir said: "Last year when Your Excellency visited our country, we were keen to participate and contribute in a small way in the reconstruction of your country. The determination, expertise and experience is still there. But today, they (the companies) do not have the means to do so.

"We regret very much that apart from just two or three companies, the others whom you have most warmly welcomed and encouraged have had the carpets pulled from under their feet. In fact, even in our country, our capacity to invest and develop have been diminished."

The Prime Minister said Malaysia and Mozambique have many things in common but they need to discover each other better so that they could undertake mutually beneficial co-operative ventures.

"It is important for both of our private sectors to be familiar with each other, to know the local laws and regulations and how business is conducted in our respective countries," he said.

Meanwhile, Malaysian businessmen began meeting their counterparts from Mozambique yesterday to explore opportunities.

Mozambique has vast economic potential in the field of tourism (it was regarded as the first playground in Africa), agriculture (mainly fishing), petroleum products and port facilities.

Maputo is increasingly regarded as the gateway to the rest of the Africa from the eastern front. Work is already under way linking landlocked neighbouring countries to Maputo port, thus helping Mozambique to realise further its economic potentials.

Today, Dr Mahathir will open International Commerce Bank, a Malaysia-Mozambique joint-venture, and will be given a briefing by the Ministry of Transport and Communication on Maputo fishing port and harbour.

He will then meet businessmen at a lunch hosted by Petronas and after that visit the Institute of Agriculture Research and the Matola Industrial Zone.

At night, he will launch Bank Austral, another joint-venture between Malaysia and Mozambique.

Tomorrow, he will continue talks with Chissano and witness the signing of an economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation agreement.

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