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Fayed-Malaysia

HARRODS OWNER PRAISES MAHATHIR AND MALAYSIA

By: Abdul Rahman Ahmad

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 4 (Bernama) -- Harrods owner Mohamed Al-Fayed said today his business foray into Malaysia was because of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, whom he described as a great prime minister.

" I am here because of the great prime minister. His name happens to be Mohamad and mine too," he told a news conference here after announcing that his renowned London departmental store would set up an outlet at the soon-to-be opened KL International Airport (KLIA) at Sepang.

" I am a great friend of the prime minister and I appreciate his friendship. Now is the time and duty between friends to see any possibility to help this country," said the Egyptian-born tycoon, with Dr Mahathir by his side.

He said he was not here solely for business but more for the sake of his friendship with the prime minister.

" You have lots of potentials and promising business opportunities. All the world needs to know is the type of people and country this is, (and) investors will be happy to invest," he added.

" I want to be an example to others to put all my knowledge and bring my business friends over and try to help Malaysia," said Al-Fayed, whose business plans here were seen as a significant foreign investment boost.

According to a statement issued ahead of the news conference, Harrods would also market Malaysian-made products like golf buggies, MEC-brand electrical appliances and garments at its London store.

Dr Mahathir told the news conference: " Harrods has been sending people to Malaysia to look at investment opportunities. With Al-Fayed's business and the supply to Harrods of Malaysian-made products, will help Malaysia ease our economic problems".

Al-Fayed, here on a three-day visit to explore investment opportunities, yesterday visited the resort island of Langkawi.

Dr Mahathir said his visit to Langkawi would hopefully promote the island and Malaysia to the world.

Al-Fayed was also scheduled to hold talks with Petronas, the national oil corporation, and the Securities Commission and Economic Adviser to the government Tun Daim Zainuddin.

Al-Fayed earlier visited the RM9 billion KLIA, scheduled to be operational in April.

He said he made up his mind to set up the outlet at KLIA, which he described as a very impressive airport.

"I was so impressed today (with the airport). It was just like the pyramid. It is tremendous. It's going to be the greatest airport in the world and that is the vision of the Prime Minister who is so committed," he said.

Al Fayed also made a pledge to help promote Malaysia overseas, including through filming the country.

"You have nice people, many natural resources which the world has to know about." he said.

"I think it is time for me to start (investment) with Harrods," he added

Al-Fayed said his investments in Malaysia, including the KLIA outlet and the golf buggies, would come to some five million pounds (1 pound=RM6.8).

Asked if it was the appropriate time for Malaysia to allow such investments in view of the economic downturn, Al-Fayed said: "You are not

going to pay anything .. I am going to bring business and investment to rebuild this place (Harrods at KLIA) with merchandise worth between US\$20 million and US\$30 million (US\$1=RM4.10) and it will be a huge space.

"We are going to re-label the clothing you're going to manufacture and export it to our duty free shops which could fetch millions of dollars. We have 24 duty free shops, including six in the UK, with a daily turnover of between three and four million pounds."

Al-Fayed, who pledged to promote Malaysia among his clients and those doing business with Harrods, suggested that Malaysia adopt a more imaginative outlook in promoting the country as a tourist destination.

"What Malaysia needs is good marketing," he said.

"Here you are just beginning .. the Caribbean is old fasion but here with islands and with proper planning it can be a great attraction to millions to enjoy."

Al-Fayed said he also planned to send a famous film director to take shots of scenes in Malaysia.

"I have seen Langkawi and its beauty," he said, adding that he had suggestions on how Malaysia could "market and sell the weather, the people, the athmosphere, the generosity, you have all the resources ... all you need a little bit of imagination and the country can take off,"

Dr Mahathir said he hoped big travel agencies in Britain that did business with Harrods would help bring tourists to Malaysia.

He also hoped that Al-Fayed would be satisfied with what he saw during his visit, saying the Harrods owner had even landed his plane at the KLIA.

"The Malaysian products which are to be sold at the Harrods in KLIA may not necessarily be for Malaysians but also for foreigners. We hope they will do well and sell the products as this will make Malaysian products well known," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Al-Fayed, who is also a philanthropist, had expressed his desire to visit orphanges in the country. -- BERNAMA

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