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Vast opportunities in Sudan for investment

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WHEN one talks about Sudan, the image which usually comes to mind is that of war and famine - thanks to Cable News Network which features the country in this manner.

However, such negative depiction of Sudan has no basis, as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, his official delegation and Malaysian business representatives found out on a recent visit.

Sudan may be a sorry sight in the eyes of the outside world a decade ago but today, it is a land of vast opportunities, especially to foreign investors.

According to Dr Mahathir, International Monetary Fund (IMF) managing director Michel Camdessus himself expressed satisfaction over Sudan's development.

Sudan Information Minister Ghazi Salehuddin, speaking to Malaysian reporters in Khartoum recently, said his country is vast and has much agricultural resources. "It is one of the agriculture giants of the world," he said.

Sudan, the largest country in Africa, shares its international boundary with eight neighbours: Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Zaire, Central African Republic, Chad and Libya.

The country is well-irrigated by the White Nile and the Blue Nile. The two rivers in fact meet in Khartoum, its capital. Its arable land totals 2.5 million sq km and only a certain percentage has been used.

There is already a Malaysian presence in Sudan. Petronas has opened an office in Khartoum to oversee its single largest foreign onshore operations there.

Its investments totalled more than RM2 billion and the recoverable reserves at Blocks 1, 2 and 4 in the Muglad Basin in the southern part of Sudan are expected to contribute about one-third of Malaysia's oil reserves by the year 2002.

Advanced Synergy Bhd is rehabilitating the 100-year old Grand Hotel, which fronts the scenic White Nile. The Grand Villa Hotel will open its doors in August.

More investments are forthcoming. One area is agriculture, especially in oil palm cultivation.

Deputy Primary Industries Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein, who accompanied Dr Mahathir on the visit, said Tabung Haji, the Palm Oil Research of Malaysia (Porim) and several Sudanese universities are conducting a study for the purpose.

"We see potential in Sudan. We see for ourselves the situation here and it is nowhere near as bad as perceived by many.

"The fact that they (the Sudan Government) is comfortable with us, and giving priority to our investors, goes a long way towards strengthening our trade and investment cooperation," Hishammuddin said.

Another area which can be pursued by Malaysians is tourism, which has yet to realise its full potential there. Malaysians can dispense their expertise in the area.

Ghazi said the country sees a fair number of tourists, especially in the north of the country which offers visitors the chance to visit archaeological sites.

Sudan also boasts of pyramids which are as old as the ones in Egypt.

In the south, tourists can go on safaris. "It is safe here. Check out

the police stations. You will not find any reports of attacks on tourists.
"In fact, muggers will refrain from mugging you if they know you are a
tourist," Ghazi said.

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