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Helping others to help us

THE sharing of expertise and resources within a smart partnership framework has benefited Malaysia and this win-win concept must be extended to countries less fortunate than us so that we can grow together. Just as investors from countries such as Japan, South Korea, the United States, Taiwan and those from Europe have invested and helped us develop, Malaysian entrepreneurs must similarly help create job opportunities and wealth in the countries they invest in. This is particularly so in developing countries which can better relate to our experience.

Far from being parochial, Malaysia is convinced such reciprocity will help the host countries to prosper and, in turn, expand their markets and narrow the development disparity between nations. This "prosper thy neighbour" philosophy has often been expounded by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the prime mover of closer South-South co-operation. It has helped bring development to Malaysia and the smart partnership concept has been widely adopted by African countries.

In his visit to Uganda where he attended the Global 2001 Smart Partnership International Dialogue and launched the Malaysian Business Centre (U) Ltd in Kampala, Dr Mahathir called on our businessmen to use Uganda as a base to supply products to neighbouring African countries. We have always believed in friendly relations with others and, together with mutual understanding, there is a lot to be gained in trade and investment, and in affairs of state as well. Developing countries need more foreign direct investments and trade to keep them from being dependent on aid. Co-operation, therefore, is the key to survival in an increasingly competitive world.

The digital divide in an era of globalisation has widened the gap between rich and poor nations. At the same time, the combination of new sources of raw materials with new technology has added more value to a product than ever before. Thus, investors must mobilise every effort to discharge their responsibilities and obligations to enrich their host countries besides generating profits for themselves. Impoverished nations cannot possibly offer good markets to more well-to-do economies. In the long run, the loss of such markets will affect all countries economically.

Malaysian companies can use Malaysian Business Centre (U) to create awareness in Africa of their goods and services. Pride in a product extends to its marketing and promotion to ensure it reaches the targeted markets. Our private sector seems to fall short in this respect for all too often, Malaysian goods are sold to other markets through third parties. Dr Mahathir's message to these companies to take more pride in their goods is implicit, and understandably so. With every visit that he makes abroad with an entourage of both Government officials and businessmen, he helps to open up new markets and avenues for co-operation.

The onus is on the delegation to take up the initiative of follow-up visits and possible joint ventures. The lack of dynamism on the part of companies and their reluctance to take risks is only to their detriment. If they do not take up the challenge, make use of the opportunities available, the one standing next in line will. The essence is that companies cannot afford to remain static in a world where technology and markets are constantly changing.

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