

18 AUG 2001

Mahathir-Arrive

MAHATHIR ARRIVES IN UGANDA FOR SMART PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

KAMPALA, Aug 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here on Saturday afternoon for the Global 2001 International Smart Partnership Dialogue hosted by Uganda.

Dr Mahathir, who flew in after ending an official visit to Yemen, was met on arrival at the Entebbe Airport, some 40 km outside the Ugandan capital, by Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni and Malaysian High Commissioner to Uganda, Ali Abdullah.

Accompanying the prime minister was his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and several Malaysian officials.

This is the first time that the Smart Partnership dialogue is held in an East African country. Five earlier editions were held in Southern African countries, the last in Mozambique last year.

The informal dialogue, which evolved from the Langkawi International Dialogue, is a brainchild of Dr Mahathir and is premised on a prosper thy neighbour policy where partnerships should lead to mutual benefits.

It kicks off tonight with a welcoming dinner hosted by President Museveni.

Heads of governments from most Southern African countries have confirmed their participation for the dialogue themed "Enhancing Foreign Direct Investment."

Later on Saturday, the prime minister is expected to open the Malaysian Business Centre (U) Ltd (MBC), located in the heart of the city aimed at promoting Malaysian products in Uganda.

MBC is a 60:40 joint venture between Masscorp Trading Sdn Bhd and a Malaysian businessman based here, Sekaran Vellasamy.

While here, Dr Mahathir and his entourage would stay at the Speke Resort in Munyonyo Village on the shores of Lake Victoria some 15 km east of Kampala where the dialogue, which ends on Tuesday, would be held.

Located on the equator, Uganda is a landlocked country of about 24,000 sq. km in size, about the same as the United Kingdom, with a population of 22 million.

Agriculture contributes about 56 percent to the country's Gross Domestic Product while manufacturing accounts for 12 percent.

Coffee is the major cash crop, followed by tea, tobacco and sugar, bananas, cassava, sweet potatoes and beans.

Uganda has had a traumatic political past since winning independence in 1962 from Britain, having recorded no less seven changes of government, four of which was carried out by military coups, including by the regime of General Idi Amin from 1971 to 1979.

President Museveni, who headed the National Resistance Movement, took power in 1986 and since then, there has been political stability which has contributed to the country's increased prosperity.

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