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PM: Uganda offers vast investment potential

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MALAYSIAN goods are well accepted in Uganda, a country that also offers vast potential for Malaysian businessmen to invest, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said Uganda has the potential to be developed further, especially in the infrastructural and tourism sectors.

For instance, Dr Mahathir said, Uganda's infrastructural facilities are relatively weak because, for a country which has a population similar to Malaysia at 22 million, the power generation capacity is only about 300 Megawatts (MW) compared to Malaysia's capacity of more than 10,000MW.

"The roads in Uganda, though much better than they used to be, are not very comfortable," he told newsmen after returning from Uganda in Subang yesterday. Dr Mahathir attended the Global 2001 Smart Partnership International Dialogue in Kampala on August 18.

He said there is a great potential for tourism in Uganda such as Lake Victoria which has yet to be exploited.

"Lake Victoria is huge, but from the plane, I did not see a single boat, not even a fishing or a leisure boat. It seems they do not (make good use of) the lake and I believe Malaysian entrepreneurs can build good resorts there," he said.

Furthermore, Dr Mahathir said the state capital of Kampala, has a cool climate, being located at 4,000 ft above sea level. This is also good potential which can be developed further.

While its previous leaders like Idi Amin and Milton Obote does not seem keen to focus on development, Dr Mahathir said the current President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has interest to develop the country.

"Uganda under the previous leaders are more involved in a political tussle for quite some time but the current president stresses on the importance of developing the country," he said.

In addition, he said bilateral relations between the Malaysian and Ugandan governments is good, which allows Malaysian businessmen the opportunity to invest as well as engage in direct trading with the African country.

"They claimed that, on attaining independence, their per capita income was similar to Malaysia's at US\$300 (US\$1 = RM3.80) but it remained static until now while Malaysia's per capita income has risen to US\$5,000. They said they are impressed with Malaysia and wish to learn from us," he said.

He also said Malaysian goods are well received by the Ugandan people, especially with the setting up of a Malaysian business centre, which he officiated at during his recent visit to Uganda.

For example, he said, almost all of the fluorescent lamps available there are imported from Malaysia.

"If we push our products, we can export a lot to Uganda and also buy their goods such as tea, coffee and cotton. These are also good for Malaysian investments," he said. Prior to Uganda, he was on a three-day visit to Yemen.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the Malaysian Human Rights Commission's (Suhakam) inquiry report on the Kesas highway-Jalan Kebun illegal gathering last year which he considered as being influenced by Western thinking.

"They (Suhakam members) are not thinking in the interest of Malaysia. Suhakam should have given some weight to the evidence given during its

inquiry by the police who were working under pressure to deal with the illegal assembly on November 5 last year.

"That is their (Suhakam's) view and they only view from one angle and only look at police brutality. At times, the police have to resort to force because the demonstrators too use force," he said.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on the report released by Suhakam Commissioner Tan Sri Anuar Zainal Abidin on Monday which blamed the police for human rights violations during crowd dispersal and treatment of people arrested for taking part in the illegal assembly.

The Suhakam inquiry, by a three-member panel headed by Anuar, heard testimonies from 46 witnesses over a 20-day hearing beginning November 29 last year. Seven expert witnesses, including four doctors who treated those injured in the incident, were among those who gave evidence.

Police detained 125 people in the incident and among the weapons seized were parangs and wooden bats.

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