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PM: Our investors abroad have duty to enrich host nations

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in Kampala

MALAYSIAN businessmen have been reminded to ensure that the people in the countries they are investing in prosper and benefit from their ventures.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when launching Malaysian Business Centre (U) Ltd in the Ugandan capital on Saturday evening, said Malaysian businessmen should strive to find ways to enrich these countries.

They should not be investing in a country merely to make money and drain their resources, he said.

They had a duty, he added, to develop and help the local people.

Stressing the smart partnership concept which ensured a "win-win" situation for both parties, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had benefited tremendously from this.

"Investors from Japan, Korea, the United States and Europe invested and helped our country develop.

"They created job opportunities for us to the extent that today we have to rely on foreign workers in some sectors.

"That's how we have prospered and, therefore, we must use the same strategy and approach to help Uganda and enrich its resources."

Also present were Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie and Rural Development Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid.

Dr Mahathir said the smart partnership concept which had succeeded in developing Malaysia had now been widely adopted by nations in the African continent.

"That's why I attended this (Smart Partnership International) dialogue. I hope Malaysian businessmen will help the country they are investing in to prosper."

He urged Malaysian businessmen in Uganda to strive to create jobs for the Ugandans.

"When they become richer, we can sell more to them. I saw a lot of furniture being sold along the streets in Kampala and that shows the people here have the skills and ability to produce furniture.

"By giving them a little bit of training, I am sure they could produce high-quality furniture."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysian companies, especially Malaysian Business Centre, could use Uganda as a base to supply products to neighbouring African countries.

Speaking to reporters later, the Prime Minister said Malaysian businessmen must learn to market their products themselves instead of allowing others to reap profits from them.

During his visit to Yemen, he said, he saw a lot of Malaysian goods sold there but the problem was "it was not sold by Malaysians".

"It was imported by third parties ... this is something which happens all the time ... we must learn to market our own products ourselves."

Asked whether he felt that Malaysian businessmen were not doing enough to market their products, he said:

"Well, our people are lazy ... if they can, they will let other people do the business they produce ... they don't care where the goods have gone to."

But, he said, more people have realised that by marketing their products themselves, they stood to gain more.

"They must learn to market themselves ... now they can market it themselves with the setting up of so many centres. In Bahrain, we are going to set up a centre for the distribution of Malaysian-made goods.

"I am quite sure we will be able to identify the importers and agents who will then market things for us."

On the smart partnership concept which Malaysian businessmen should apply when investing overseas, the Prime Minister said they should try to help the local people increase their income.

"Wherever we go, including Namibia, we have helped them with their businesses ... and that's the way to go, really ... not just coming and make money for your own and then go home."