

# PM: Success did not **come easy**

By **K. PARKARAN**

CASABLANCA: Malaysia's success in the tourism industry did not come easy as it suffered from an -image problem many years ago, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said almost everybody in the world knew about Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines but most did not know 'where Malaysia was although these countries were its neighbour.

"Although we had been independent for several decades then, some thought that we were in the Himalayas while there were those who thought we were Malawi in Africa.

"But what hurt most was when everyone kept saying we're near Singapore. The truth is Singapore is near Malaysia." he told 300-odd businessmen during a dialogue organised by the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprise.

Today, Dr Mahathir said, Malaysia stood tall in the tourism sector with 12.8 million arrivals recorded last year compared to two million in 1990, adding that the figure was expected to go up this year.

He was responding to a question from confederation resident M. Hassan Chami who described the figure as impressive as Morocco only attracted about four million

tourists a year. Hassan wanted to know the secret of Malaysia's success and if Malaysia could help.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia went on aggressive campaigns to sell the country through such events as the Le Tour de Langkawi cycle race and the F1 race.

However, he said the main selling point was that Malaysia was truly Asia as it had three major racial groups staying together in harmony and displaying rich culture.

Dr Mahathir said there were Malays who looked like Indonesians, Chinese who looked like Thais and there were also Indians. "So why go to those countries when you can see all of them in Malaysia?" he said to laughter from the audience.

The Prime Minister was confident that Morocco would attract Malaysians as its selling point was the country's great history.

Dr Mahathir later witnessed the signing of two memorandums of understanding between the private sector of the two countries.

He wrapped up his three-day visit to Morocco by visiting the Moroccan National Car (Somaca) assembly plant and touring the Craftsmen House and the popular Habous Bazaar.

The Prime Minister left here yesterday morning for Libya for a two-day visit.