

PM: M'sia ideal for investors

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By K. PARKARAN

TRIPOLI: Malaysia is a model of a progressive Muslim country providing a conducive environment for foreign investors, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Urging Libyan businessmen to invest in Malaysia, he said the country was tolerant and secure despite some negative Western reports, particularly in the aftermath of the Sept 11 tragedy in the United States.

"Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-lingual country. All races in the country live in harmony and Malaysia draws its strength from its multi-eth-

nic diversity," he said at a dinner with Libyan businessmen on Thursday.

Dr Mahathir said political stability, racial harmony and the progressive minds of its people were instrumental in the growth of the economy, which averaged more than 8% per annum from 1988 till 1997, prior to the East Asian financial crisis.

Although Malaysia experienced an economic contraction of 7.4% in 1998, he said it recovered quickly to register a growth of 6.1% the following year and 8.3% in 2000.

"The global economic slowdown in 2001 affected Malaysia's growth last year with the country registering a

real GDP growth of only 0.4%. With the upturn this year, the growth is forecast at 3.5%.

"From a nation heavily dependent on primary commodities some 40 years ago, the country is now diversified with a broad economic base. We are the 18th largest trading nation in the world with 80% of exports comprising manufactured products," he said.

The Prime Minister said he had noted the efforts of Libya in attracting foreign investments into the country, particularly following the suspension of United Nations sanctions in 1999.

As Malaysia had been successful in attracting sizeable

foreign investments over the years, Dr Mahathir said it was willing to share its experience in this field and take part in Libya's investment drive through joint ventures and collaboration.

"Malaysian companies have ventures in many fields, including manufacturing, construction of highways, ports and airports, infrastructure development such as power generation, telecommunications and water treatment plants," he added.

He said that although Malaysia was relatively a small country with a population of only 24 million, it was nevertheless a gateway to the more than 530 million-strong

Asean market which was now in the final year of evolution into the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta).

"The Libyan business community should use Malaysia as their springboard into the Asean market," he added.

With the conclusion of the Bilateral Trade Agreement; the Economic, Scientific Co-operation Agreement yesterday, Dr Mahathir said the framework for closer co-operation had been laid down by both governments.

However, he said it was the private sector's active involvement that would help realise the objective of an enhanced economic relations between both countries.