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Mahathir-Fiji

MALAYSIAN AND FIJIAN PRIVATE SECTORS URGED TO INTERACT MORE

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 5 (Bernama) -- Greater interactions and collaboration need to be encouraged between the private sectors of Fiji and Malaysia, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

The Prime Minister said given the right incentives and support by both governments, greater efforts could be made to exploit the opportunities available to further enhance mutually beneficial trade and economic collaboration between the two countries.

Bilateral trade between the two countries amounted to RM96.3 million last year, still relatively small, he said at a dinner he hosted for visiting Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka at Sri Perdana.

Rabuka arrived yesterday for a three-day official visit.

Also present at the dinner were Rabuka's wife Suluweti and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali.

"Some big names like Berjaya Group and Kuok Brothers have already made their presence felt in Fiji and Malaysia. We are also happy to see our national car, the Proton Saga, making inroads into the Fijian market," said Dr Mahathir.

He said Malaysia is identifying new areas for technical cooperation to better meet the needs and requirements of both countries as well as enhancing the South-South cooperation.

The present areas of cooperation between both countries include trade, investment, technical, education, tourism, agriculture, finance, transportation and defence.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia is looking forward to welcome Fiji back into the Commonwealth as early as possible so as to enable it to resume its constructive role as a member of the organisation.

Rabuka, in his response, said Fiji looks forward to being accorded observer status in Asean.

At present, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia hold observer status in the regional grouping.

"We feel that by greater participation, by greater interaction with Asian states, there will be mutual benefit," he said.

He said Fiji aspired to be a member of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum and the proposed East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) mooted by Dr Mahathir.

Rabuka said Fiji, with its vast natural resources such as timber and minerals as well as an educated workforce, has adopted an open approach to foreign investors and welcomes Malaysian enterprises and know-how to help in developing the island nation.

He thanked Malaysia for its assistance in training Fijian military officers, civil servants, school principals and, most recently, the secondment of High Court judge Datuk Dr Zakaria Yatim to examine the report of the Fijian Constitution Review Commission.

In return, Rabuka said, Fiji wishes to offer its expertise to Malaysia in sports, especially rugby, in which his country excels.

"We might be able to help you with a coach or two for your own team in your preparations for the Commonwealth Games," he said.

Fiji is also ready to offer its English teachers to serve in Malaysian schools, he said. -- BERNAMA

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