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Mahathir-Business

PM SEES MALAYSIA-GUINEA TIES GOING BEYOND BUSINESS

By: Rachman Nordin

CONAKRY (Guinea), Nov 6 (Bernama) -- Malaysia expects its relations with Guinea, a former French colony in West Africa, to go beyond business deals and cater to Guinea's nation-building needs as well, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"This commitment is attested by our efforts to complement the programmes of the Guinean government to meet the basic needs of the people," he told a Malaysia-Guinea business seminar over luncheon here.

He said Malaysia has taken the initiative to work with Guinea towards food self-sufficiency through the development of rice-farming, milling and distribution.

"We are prepared to work together in other areas to assist the Guinean government in realising its socio-economic objectives where we may be competent," he added.

The seminar was part of Dr Mahathir's second day programme of his four-day official visit here. An 85-member business delegation led by Arab-Malaysian group chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim is accompanying the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister's official delegation includes Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid and Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee.

Dr Mahathir identified agriculture as one of the areas which has much potential for development in Guinea and proposed that Malaysian companies with plantation management expertise seriously consider transferring their know-how to Guinea.

"Malaysian companies could establish new plantations in Guinea. Alternatively, downstream activities based on processing of coffee and cocoa, among others, could be undertaken together," he said.

Agriculture accounts for almost 20 per cent of Guinea's gross domestic product and employs 80 per cent of the workforce.

The Prime Minister listed mining as another area for greater Malaysian participation, especially in downstream mineral processing activities which he said is all the more feasible as Guinea has excellent potential for the generation of competitively-priced hydro-electricity.

Guinea is endowed with bauxite and vast reserves of other untapped minerals and its mining industry accounts for 85 per cent of the country's export.

Some Malaysian companies are already at an advanced stage of negotiation to invest in mining ventures.

"Development of mining industries should open the threshold towards broad-based industrialisation in Guinea," he said.

Dr Mahathir expressed confidence that the Malaysian and Guinean private sectors could complement each other in tourism, housing, power supply and in Guinea's infrastructural development.

He urged the Malaysian private sector to address such key areas as housing and rehabilitation of power supply as this would contribute directly to the quality of life in Guinea and lead to other economic spin-offs.

Guinea, a French-speaking nation of about seven million people of whom 85 per cent are Muslim, recorded total global trade of US\$1.4 billion (RM3.5 billion) last year.

Compared with that global figure, Dr Mahathir described as low the

current level of Malaysia-Guinea trade which nonetheless has been growing steadily from US\$3.7 million (RM9.25 million) in 1994 to US\$4.6 million (RM11.5 million) last year.

Guinea imports detergents, processed palm oil and plastic products from Malaysia and exports raw materials to Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir suggested that Guinea use Malaysia as its base to source consumer products and industrial inputs and that Guinean businessmen take advantage of Malaysia's low tariff regime to strengthen complementary trade relations.

"Guinea's major exports of bauxite, alumina, gold and coffee could easily find a market in Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali arrived here on Tuesday night after a six-hour flight from Harare where he attended the G-15 summit in Zimbabwe.

They were received by President Lansana Conte in a customary airport welcoming ceremony which featured inspection of a guard-of-honour and the playing of the national anthem of both countries.

Conte visited Malaysia in September last year. -- BERNAMA

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