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Daim: Our performance has impressed Morocco

Rashid Yusof in Marrakesh

MOROCCO has always looked to Europe as its main business partner, but the Malaysian economic feat is making this North African nation to reconsider its options.

Moroccan Prime Minister Abdelatif Filali told Economic Adviser to the Government Tun Daim Zainuddin that Morocco now wanted to look towards Malaysia.

"The Prime Minister said the past is history. He is keen to visit Malaysia and I shall convey this to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad," Daim, who yesterday ended the first-leg of his nine-country visit to Africa, said after the meeting.

In a country where the Malaysian delegation was reminded by some that Morocco and Malaysia had been drawn in the same group in the Junior World Cup in Kuala Lumpur, Daim led the private sector representatives to a series of meetings where discussions had been frank.

Daim said he met Filali at his residence in Rabat on Saturday and communicated the reasons why some people thought the tourism industry in Morocco was not flourishing.

"The hotels are expensive, service is poor and there is nothing new in the market," he said, adding that the Moroccan Prime Minister was in favour of such exchange of views.

Daim said Morocco used to have more tourists.

On reforms being undertaken by Morocco, he said there must be political will in all sections to push through the changes.

Daim said he was impressed by people he met in the private sector.

He had said before that the "brains" factor was an attraction in Morocco. "They are also multi-lingual."

Most Moroccans speak French and some speak English and Spanish as well.

Wrapping up his visit to Morocco, Daim also visited a big housing project where 20,030 mixed houses are being built on land given by King Hassan II.

The houses, built by a French firm, with local companies taking care of the other facilities, will be ready in stages.

The first 1,000 families will move in July to the site located some 10km from Rabat. It used to be a kariat (village).

Daim also visited Marrakesh, a major tourist attraction. He had, on arrival in Rabat on Thursday, been told that the best hotel in Rabat, which comes with a large piece of land and a virtual monopoly, was sold recently to a foreign buyer for US\$25 million.

He said this showed how important it was for the private sector to go and see opportunities in other countries, which cannot be compensated through reading and other means.

Yesterday, Daim and the delegation left for Guinea, which was visited by Dr Mahathir in September.

Meanwhile, head of the assistance and co-ordination branch at the Ministry of Finance and Foreign Investments, Nabil Kharroubi, said Malaysia was now a priority business partner to Morocco.

"We want to learn from Malaysia, which has the best success story," he said, adding that the ministry was planning a new mission to the Far East, especially Malaysia.

Kharrobi said the ministry was not specifying which sectors it wished the Malaysian private sector to participate in for the revival of the

Moroccan economy.

"Malaysia is strong in many sectors. We want to benefit from its achievements."

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