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Join forces to go overseas: Tajudin (HL)

Hardev Kaur in Nairobi (Kenya)

NAIROBI (Kenya), Sun: Malaysian entrepreneurs and businessmen should join forces and pool their expertise to invest overseas instead of venturing individually and competing with each other and other foreign investors for the same businesses.

By pooling their resources, Malaysian entrepreneurs can compete on a better footing, Technology Resources Industries Bhd (TRI) chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli said, suggesting that Malaysian businessmen could, for example, submit joint proposals for projects abroad.

Since the Government made the push for Malaysian investments to move abroad, Malaysian entrepreneurs have invested in numerous ventures including activities such as hotel operations, property development, aviation, telecommunications, oil exploration, and banking and other services in countries that to many Malaysians remain exotic names.

Tajudin told Business Times that joint ventures among Malaysians investing abroad should be encouraged as the "market is so big" and there is room for all.

As an entrepreneur who has interests in the aviation, telecommunications and tourism sectors, Tajudin said he does not mind cooperating with other Malaysian businessmen in ventures abroad.

With investments in telecommunications in Tanzania, Cambodia and Bangladesh, Tajudin noted that the expansion of telecommunication facilities into Kenya and Uganda is a natural extension.

The development and revival of the Eastern African Community will provide even greater opportunities for foreign investments, including from Malaysia, into the region.

Opportunities for investments in Southern and Eastern Africa, for example, are wide-ranging and while Malaysians have done well so far their resources are limited, not only in terms of manpower but also capital and expertise. This calls for cooperation among Malaysian entrepreneurs to optimise the use of the limited resources.

It is also important, according to Tajudin, that Malaysians engage locals in their businesses to enable transfer of technology as well as help the host countries to generate employment.

Tajudin said it is "cheaper" and makes economic sense to employ locals who are familiar with the environment, rules and culture. In the long run, it is mutually beneficial to train and employ the locals.

TRI is planning to provide training to engineers from Tanzania who will, on their return to Dar Es Salaam, help upgrade the skills of others and thus assist in the transfer of technology.

The African countries, with abundant natural resources and rich arable land, are keen to learn from Malaysia and to emulate its development process and economic management practices.

The Government, in encouraging Malaysian entrepreneurs to venture abroad, has provided various incentives and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has led numerous trade missions and helped open doors for Malaysians.

Tajudin, who met Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi for 40 minutes near Nairobi, said the President spoke highly of Malaysia and is keen to emulate the Malaysian "experiment" in developing his country.

Tajudin, who was on a one-day visit here, after attending the Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID) in Kasane, Botswana, also met the

Kenyan Minister of Planning and a number of local businessmen.

Moi, according to Tajudin, was impressed with the transformation of the Malaysian economy under the leadership of Dr Mahathir. Moi noted, for example, that at the time of Independence in 1957, Malaysia was "backward" in many areas but today the country has achieved tremendous progress and emerged as a dynamic economy.

Tajudin said Moi, who is well-informed about developments in Malaysia, also spoke of the need for direct contacts and cooperation between the two private sectors.

Moi was particularly impressed with the success of the automotive and other heavy industries which Malaysia had built up from a virtually zero base.

Kenya is also keen to learn from Malaysia's corporatisation and privatization experiments. Moi told Tajudin that he wants to see the "constructive engagement" of Kenyans in developing the fertile land. Here, Risda and Felda, for example, can join forces to produce goods for the East African market.

In addition, the products can be exported back to South-East Asia with Malaysia as the main distribution centre.

This will also increase Malaysia-Kenya trade which is still small and confined to a limited range of products.

Areas in which Kenya hopes to see greater Malaysian participation include aviation, telecommunications, agriculture, transfer of technology and manpower training.

The country is still concerned with unemployment and high inflation, which needs to be brought down to ensure a stable economic environment for both the local and foreign investors.

In addition, Moi spoke of the need to develop the money and capital markets, and strengthen the central bank and banking system to help stabilise the economy so that it can move forward.

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