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Malaysia, Pakistan to strengthen bilateral relations

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MALAYSIA and Pakistan have agreed to look into more substantive cooperation, especially in trade and economy, to strengthen bilateral ties.

Both countries certainly have a strong basis to expand and deepen their bilateral relations, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said after the inaugural Malaysia-Pakistan joint commission meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Pakistan was represented by its Foreign Minister, Mr Gohar Ayub Khan.

Trade between Malaysia and Pakistan has been on the uptrend with total trade amounting to US\$698 million (US\$1 = RM2.60) in 1996.

Abdullah urged Malaysian and Pakistani entrepreneurs to tap the full potential for bilateral cooperation as well as in third countries on the basis of smart partnerships.

Malaysian entrepreneurs have already been actively pursuing business ventures in Pakistan.

Apart from trade and investment, the joint commission will deliberate on issues such as manpower, education, agriculture, tourism and technical cooperation.

Technical cooperation on human resources can be enhanced through the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme and the Pakistan Technical Assistance Programme, Abdullah said.

"We can realise the full potential through a package of proposals involving the diversification of imports and exports, joint ventures and the relocation of labour-intensive industries," Abdullah added.

Gohar told reporters Pakistan will look into areas where it can participate in Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor project. It is also keen to study joint venture possibilities in installing gas pipelines in the Asian region and constructing a rail and road project into Central Asia.

"We also want to promote Pakistan as a gateway to the Central Asia region," Gohar said.

Gohar, who is in Kuala Lumpur as part of the Pakistani delegation accompanying the official visit to Malaysia by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, said there is tremendous scope for enhancing bilateral relations. The setting up of the joint commission reflects the need for an institutionalised mechanism to carry forward economic and commercial relations.

"We are conscious that our relationships have not been fully translated into tangible economic and commercial cooperation for mutual benefit of our people," Gohar said.

The minister added that Pakistan wanted to learn from Malaysia's experience in bringing about rapid development and improving the people's living standard, especially through the privatization process.

Gohar said Pakistan is also looking into Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's suggestion that the two countries have joint production and collaboration in the processing and marketing of palm oil.

He added that in addition to the possibility of supplying defence equipment to Malaysia, Malaysian defence personnel can be trained in Pakistani institutions.

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