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Malaysia-Argentina relations growing rapidly, says Dr M

Zainul Arifin in Buenos Aires

RELATIONS between Malaysia and Argentina, while new, have grown rapidly over the past few years with increasing trade, tourism and co-operation between the people and Government of both countries.

Bilateral trade between the two was a shade under US\$400 million (RM1.32 billion) and Malaysia was now Argentina's third largest market in Asia, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Undoubtedly we have entered a new and exciting stage in the relations not only between Malaysia and Argentina, but between the Southeast Asian region and Latin America."

He was speaking at the launch of the Malaysian Food and Cultural Festival here, organised by the Tourism Promotion Board on Thursday evening, soon after arriving in the city from Montivideo, Uruguay.

Dr Mahathir was on the last leg of his visit to four countries in the region. He was in Cuba and Chile earlier.

Also in attendance at the festival, where the menu included satay, kurma and cendol, was Argentinian President Carlos Menem.

Dr Mahathir said the close relations between the two owed much to Menem who had sensed that Asia and Latin America were natural allies.

He said with Malaysia Airlines serving as a bridge between the two countries, more people from the two regions were visiting, trading and doing business with each other. "Old barriers are giving way to new opportunities."

Argentinian companies like IMPSA have established themselves in Malaysia as well as the region, and Malaysia's Petronas Twin Towers was designed by an Argentine architect, Ceasar Pelli.

On the other hand a Malaysian company was involved in the construction of gas pipelines in Argentina, and a Malaysian polo team, Royal Pahang, was quite well known in the country.

"And Argentine beef and dulce de leche are becoming more popular in Malaysia," he said.

On Friday, apart from a bilateral meeting with Menem, Dr Mahathir was scheduled to be at the launch of the Argentine Exporters Conference on Asean Countries.

An agreement on reciprocal exemption of taxes with regard to ships and aircraft between the two countries would also be signed.

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