

07 MAR 1997

Mahathir-Mandela

MALAYSIA WANTS SOUTH AFRICA TO REDUCE IMPORT TARIFF ON PALM OIL

KUALA LUMPUR, March 7 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today asked South Africa to consider reducing the import tariff on palm oil to at least the same level as that for soyabean oil.

The request was conveyed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his discussion with South African President Nelson Mandela at the Prime Minister's Department, here.

Mandela arrived here yesterday for a five-day visit to Malaysia, the last leg of his 10-day tour to four Asean countries. He has visited the Philippines, Brunei and Singapore.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in briefing reporters on the discussion, said Dr Mahathir explained to Mandela that Malaysia wanted the import tariff for palm oil to be the same as that for other cooking oil imported by South Africa from other countries.

South Africa currently imposes an import tariff of 400 Rand (RM220) per tonne on palm oil while that for soyabean is 170 Rand (RM93) per tonne.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir informed Mandela that Malaysia was not asking for "something more", and would settle for the same tariffs.

He said Mandela could not give an immediate answer to Malaysia's request but promised to look into it.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir also assured Mandela that Malaysia would help the South Africans, especially the blacks, by sharing with them its experience and expertise in various fields like entrepreneurship, human resource and skills training.

Mandela also wanted to see more Malaysian investments in the republic which currently stood at US\$3 billion (RM7.5 billion), Abdullah said.

He told Dr Mahathir that his country needed more joint ventures between Malaysian and South African companies, especially those owned by the black community.

Mandela also said that his government planned to expand its shipping services and wanted Malaysian investors to help in the privatisation of that sector.

The South African president also assured Dr Mahathir that Malaysian investors need not worry about security because the country was stable, Abdullah said.

In their discussion on Asean-South Africa relations, Dr Mahathir and Mandela expressed the hope that Asean and the South African Development Community (SADC), two regional blocs with a total population of 600 million, would step up cooperation.

The SADC comprises 12 south African countries -- Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Abdullah said Asean and the SADC had stepped up cooperation through the meeting of their economic ministers during the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Conference in Singapore recently.

He said the ministers had expressed the hope that Asean would give attention to investing in the fields of infrastructure, energy, tourism and shipping in the African countries. -- BERNAMA

ES JK