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Kumaratunga-Success

SRI LANKA-MALAYSIA TIES SET TO SOAR WITH KUMARATUNGA'S VISIT

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 18 (Bernama) -- Describing her four-day visit to Malaysia as successful, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga today said it has also sown the seed for a closer and warmer contact between the governments of the two countries.

Fielding questions at a news conference marking the end of her visit here, Kumaratunga said Sri Lanka had learned much from Malaysia's experience in development and the role of the Malaysian government and the private sector in it.

"What I admire most is that Prime Minister Mahathir (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) has been successful in marrying development with retaining Malaysia's cultural traditions and the Malaysian ethos," she said.

The president said relations could now forge ahead based on foundations that were established between the two governments and their respective private sectors.

The visit has managed to generate some US\$1 billion in investment commitments, said Kumaratunga who earlier received a farewell call from Dr Mahathir at her hotel suite.

She also had a farewell audience with Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah at Istana Negara before flying home this evening.

To a question, she said Sri Lanka believed that the Malaysian economy was strong enough for its businessmen to invest in her country.

At a luncheon hosted by the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia (NCCIM) yesterday, Kumaratunga said Sri Lanka had created an environment which was more conducive towards attracting a "new wave" of Malaysian entrepreneurs.

On the possibility of Malaysia getting Sri Lankan workers to overcome its labour shortage, Kumaratunga said the matter came up in discussion with Dr Mahathir.

She said Malaysia had indicated the possibility of getting Sri Lankan professionals such as engineers and even its unskilled workers.

Asked on the number of workers involved, she said it had to be negotiated and that "it was just the principle that had been agreed upon."

On trade, she said Sri Lanka had much to catch up with Malaysia as the trade was largely in favour of Malaysia.

"So the flow would be, even on the theory of osmosis from Malaysia to Sri Lanka, more than the other way around.

"But what we would expect more than trade is investment from Malaysia and that is what we are promoting," she said.

Asked on how the ethnic conflict in northern Sri Lanka could affect investments, she agreed that when there was some kind of armed conflict in any country, it could affect investment and tourism for some time.

"But in Sri Lanka, it is limited to certain areas in the country," she said.

She stressed that foreign investors knew that it was quite safe to invest in Sri Lanka.

Chairman and Director-General of Sri Lanka's Board of Investment (BOI) Thilan Wijesinghe, who was present at the news conference, said the country approved a record of US\$2.8 billion last year reflecting the confidence of foreign investors. -- BERNAMA

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