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Mahathir-Kuwait

STEPPING UP MALAYSIA-KUWAIT BUSINESS TIES

By: Abdul Rahman Ahmad

KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's three-day visit to Kuwait from Saturday is expected to focus on boosting business ties between Malaysia and the desert emirate.

Kuwaiti Ambassador to Malaysia Dr Salim Jabir Al-Sabah said today bilateral ties had come a long way but not in the business sector.

Citing an example, he said a Malaysia-Kuwait investment company which was established in 1980, had been dormant and only reactivated two years ago with investment in plantation and real estate in Penang and Perak.

"Kuwait is an open and free market and with a big market in Kuwait and other Gulf countries, Malaysian businessmen should make more visits and tap the potentials in this region through joint ventures with local businessmen," he said in an interview in conjunction with the visit.

He said Kuwait is a conducive place for Malaysia businessmen to invest as it is a gateway to other Gulf nations.

"Kuwait imports raw materials and re-exports them in finished products to its traditional market among the Gulf states and Europe," he said.

He said the Kuwaiti Government encouraged the setting up of small and medium scale industries especially in furniture production where there is readily available market in the Gulf nations.

"We prefer small and medium-scale industries to control the influx of foreign workers who now number over one million," he said.

Dr Al-Sabah, who is a son of the Emir of Kuwait, said another area of cooperation between both governments could be joint investment by the Malaysian government investment arm, Khazanah Holdings, and the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) in a third country.

"If Khazanah Holdings and KIA work together, it means bigger investment. This would be discussed during Dr Mahathir's visit," he said.

Dr Al-Sabah also suggested cooperation in oil exploration and investment in oil-related products between Petronas and the Kuwait Oil Company in new potential areas like Vietnam and China.

"We need to group together in order to compete with bigger international oil companies," he said.

Kuwait was willing to share its experience and level of technology in the industry with Malaysia, he said.

He said the Kuwait National Oil Company has 5,000 petrol and service stations in Europe and 88 in Thailand.

Likewise, he said Kuwaiti businessmen could invest in Malaysia in various fields including property and construction as well as play a role in financing projects in Malaysia.

"Malaysia is doing well, there is harmony and this is one reason why development continues to take place. There are many projects and we feel we must participate," he said.

He said Dr Mahathir's visit could pave the way for enhanced relations with Kuwait now undergoing reconstruction following the destruction caused by the 1990 invasion by Iraq.

Kuwait was heading towards full economic recovery and investors should have no fear of attempts to destabilise the country, he said.

Total trade between Malaysia and Kuwait in 1995 amounted to RM342.738 million, and in Kuwait's favour.

Trade from January to November last year was RM250.510 million.

Kuwait's export to Malaysia in 1995 totalled RM171.416 million and

imports RM171.322 million.

For the Jan-Nov period last year, Kuwait's exports to Malaysia stood at RM92.241 million and imports at RM158.269.-- BERNAMA

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