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`Don't cut trade agency allocations'

PETALING JAYA, Mon. - The Government has been asked not to drastically reduce allocations for its trade agencies and other bodies which could boost business for the country.

Participants said agencies like the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, Matrade and Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board were actively engaged in promoting trade and tourism.

The call was made after roundtable discussions at the National Smart Partnership Dialogue '98 with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad acting as moderator for the first session.

The session was titled "Strengthening National Resilience Through Smart Partnership - Roles Of Private Sector, Labour And Government."

Smart Partnership promotes the concept of `prosper-thy-neighbour' and `win-win' outcomes to achieve common prosperity and mutual benefits.

The two-day dialogue which began today is organised by the Malaysian Industry-Government Group For High Technology (MIGHT) and is being attended by Government leaders, top civil servants, union leaders and representatives of non-governmental organisations.

After the discussions, MIGHT spokesman Prof Dr Ansary Ahmed said participants felt banks should be smart partners in the implementation of Government policies.

"Participants asked the Government to be clear on policies, for example, policy statements on loans. They felt the implementation of these policies were not in line with the spirit of the policies," Ansary said.

He said it was suggested that there be roadshows to differentiate Malaysia from other countries in the region to attract investments as presently foreign fund managers considered the Asia-Pacific region as one.

"Many felt that the policies on property be `revisited.' For low-cost housing they felt a higher amount be charged in urban areas. They said the ceiling of RM25,000 per unit was set 20 years ago.

"Urban area participants feel it is not attractive for the industry to sell low-cost housing at that price," Ansary said.

A call was also made to urgently review policies on bringing more women into the workforce as quickly as possible, especially qualified housewives on flexi-hours.

For the food and agriculture sectors, suggestions were made to go into these fields more aggressively. It was suggested these sectors be private sector-driven with Government policies to regulate and determine food production.

Earlier, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, speaking on the role of the Government, said it was an engine of growth, an agent of change, a motivator and a mobiliser.

He said Government also was a builder of bridges between the public and private sectors and a provider of social stability.

Malaysian Trade Union Congress president Zainal Rampak spoke on the role of labour.

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