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Eritrea keen to learn from nation's success

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ERITREA is keen to learn about Malaysia's development success and hopes to enhance ties with it.

President Isaias Afwerki said while the volume of trade between the two countries is still small, it can improve once the two nations establish more direct trade links.

Currently, bilateral trade between the two countries stands at RM1 million annually.

Etricia, he said, is keen to use Malaysia as a model to develop its country, and that many of its agencies have similar organisational structures like those in Malaysia.

"I am amazed with the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) structure when we visited it. We may even say our Macro Economic Development Unit is copied from the EPU, although we never visited EPU before.

"The function, objectives and mission are a replica to those of the Macro Economic Development Unit," he told reporters before leaving for home yesterday after his two-day visit.

Afwerki said Malaysian businessmen who are interested to invest in the African countries are welcome to Eritrea as it offers good opportunities in the fisheries sector, tourism and industrial manufacturing such as textile and leather.

There are potentials in the services, transportation and communications sectors, he said.

Earlier, Malaysia and Eritrea signed a bilateral agreement in a move to increase ties between the two countries. The signing of the economic, scientific, technical and cultural agreement was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Afwerki after their meeting at the Prime Minister's Department in Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia was represented by Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik while Eritrea's Transport and Communications Minister Salih Kekia signed for his government.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad said both countries would explore ways to enhance their economic linkages taking into account the current economic downturn of the region.

"The President is looking at Malaysia because the structure of Eritrea which is a multi-cultural and multi-religious country is similar to Malaysia," Toyad said.

Toyad said Afwerki invited the Malaysian business community to invest in his country "when the time is right".

Dr Mahathir also suggested that the two countries exchange television programmes to enable the people of Malaysia and Eritrea to understand more about each other.

Toyad said Malaysia would welcome Eritrean officials for training stints here. "Eritrea is a very young nation but it has the determination to develop politically and economically," he said.

Among those present at the meeting were Special Functions Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman who was the minister-in-attendance.

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