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Ghana envoy finds current woes no barrier to `selling' trade

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"YOU may be surprised to learn that Ghana's main export to Malaysia is cocoa," says Francis Adjei Danso, the first resident High Commissioner from Ghana.

As High Commissioner, he says his main job will be to promote trade between the two countries and encourage Malaysian investments to Ghana. In 1996, trade between the two countries stood at RM18.04 million and last year, it was RM33.6 million.

"You can see that although the value is small, trade is growing. That is my duty, to increase trade in terms of value and volume over time," says Danso.

He explains that Ghana cocoa is rated as premium grade. Cocoa is cultivated by smallholders, so the quality is very high and it carries a different price.

"Manufacturers of chocolate and those in the confectionery industry need the Ghana cocoa to add to the low-grade cocoa, in order to get the proper mixture in terms of texture and flavour."

Another area he is pursuing is technical assistance, particularly in training. Danso says in the past three years there have been 101 Ghanaians who have benefited from training courses in Malaysia. Some of the fields are irrigation, broadcasting, archival studies, and public administration.

"It will be my responsibility to explore new areas, new avenues, particularly in the area of information technology where Malaysia is acquiring expertise."

On the political side, Danso says he would like to strengthen the ties between the two countries that have existed since both nations attained their independence from Britain in 1957 - Ghana in March and Malaysia in August.

This was in the midst of the Cold War and newly-independent countries had to fashion a policy that would allow them to steer clear of the conflict between East and West. That was how the Non-Aligned Movement arose, explains Danso.

"Your first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, played a crucial role in shaping NAM policy. He collaborated with our first President, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, Sukarno of Indonesia, Naser of Egypt and Nehru of India. These were the stalwarts of non-alignment at that time.

"The tradition that Tunku Abdul Rahman left, I can still see here and that Dr Mahathir has carried it on. Malaysia has the courage to say the right things. This has been a tradition that we share.

"This is what our leaders are doing and it is a tradition which was established by the leaders of NAM," says Danso.

The country is proud of one of its citizens, United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan who is a Ghanaian.

"We are proud, and we share that pride with others. If you have the courage to speak your mind and people know you are telling the truth, they will respect you.

"Kofi Annan is respected, not because he comes from a rich country but because of what he does. Ghana is not rich but we practice democracy, we respect human rights and we speak our mind clearly. Annan has been brought up in that tradition."

He sees one of his duties as High Commissioner as ensuring that Ghanaian delegations collaborate effectively with their Malaysian counterparts to

enhance south-south co-operation and advance the interests of developing countries.

"But the emphasis is on economic co-operation. I will be a salesman. It may interest you to know that we have many Malaysian companies in Ghana now. Malaysia fully owns one bank in Ghana - International Commercial Bank - which is already in operation."

Other Malaysian investments in Ghana include a joint venture between Penang Shipyard with the Ghana government for the operation of the Tema Shipyard and Drydock; GAMA Media Systems which is involved in film production, audio and video recordings, film distribution and other related activities; and Telekom Malaysia has formed a consortium with three Ghanaian firms to acquire 30 per cent of Ghana Telecom Ltd.

Danso says there are also opportunities for Malaysian investment in other areas like agriculture, manufacturing in industries for export, construction, tourism and general services.

In response to whether Malaysia's current economic problems have made it more difficult for him to be a "salesman", Danso says no. In fact, Malaysians continue to be keen on investing in Ghana.

"We have faith in the policies of your government. We believe these are just fleeting moments of discomfiture. Nations do not live for just a specific period and relations between countries do not just last for a specific period, they span the fullness of time.

"Even though there are problems, this is the time you should look for your friends and they should stand up and be counted. Your friends should not desert you, so this is the time we should increase our imports," says Danso.

Although he has been a diplomat for 36 years, this is his first visit to Malaysia. He is impressed with the unity of purpose of Malaysians.

While he is here, he wants to initiate the twinning of schools between Ghana and Malaysia.

"You understand people if you know their culture, that is the way to get on with people. The children get to know each other by talking about themselves, when they become adults they will continue to be friends," he says.

English is the official language in Ghana, but at home they speak their own dialects. According to Danso, in primary schools children are encouraged to speak not only their own dialect but a dialect of another ethnic group. "Children are tested on their ability to speak another dialect. It allows for ethnic fusion and better understanding."

Ghana has also started a pilot programme of bringing computers and the Internet into rural schools. Danso says it is part of a programme to open up the rural areas.

There is a rural-urban drift in Ghana, says Danso and the government is trying to reverse this trend by making the rural areas more attractive. The government is building infrastructure and giving tax incentives to businesses who invest in rural areas.

"The government wants to create conditions for the people to stay in their own environment. In a village, people help each other in bad times and in good times, they all share. It is important to take advantage of this unity and make it attractive for them to stay."

The 60-year-old diplomat says he did not make a conscious choice to join the foreign service but that he enjoys his job. In retrospective, he says he would not choose differently.

Before coming to Malaysia, Danso was the Secretary to the Cabinet. Because he was in the foreign service, he was not as knowledgeable about the home service as other civil servants.

"It was tough at first, but my background in the foreign service helped

me overcome problems easily."

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