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IRAN AGREES TO STUDY RESTRICTION IMPOSED ON USE OF PALM OIL IN SHORTENING

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 (Bernama) -- Iran has agreed to consider its decisions restricting the usage of crude palm oil in shortening as well as the difference in import tariff between palm oil and other vegetable oils.

Both issues were brought up by International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz at a meeting with Iran's Minister of Trade Mohammad Shariatmadari.

At the meeting, Iran also suggested that Malaysia build a palm oil refinery plant at the city of Abbas to supply the markets in Iran and nearby areas.

Rafidah is currently on a three-day visit to Iran beginning Feb 21.

In a press statement released here today, Rafidah also sought the Iranian government to reduce import tariff on cocoa beans and urged Iran not to impose more stringent conditions from the current standard applied at international level.

Both parties also discussed and agreed to enhance bilateral trade which amounted to RM389 million in 1997. The parties also agreed to look into areas which could be ventured into including manufacturing of car components, machinery, agricultural products and goods and the electronics sector.

Malaysia and Iran also agreed that both countries be made the main link/entrance for products of the respective country, into Asean and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

This is because the city of Abbas has transport facilities and free trade zone for Malaysia to venture into the CIS market, while Malaysia could be the stepping stone for Iranian companies to penetrate the Asean market.

Both parties also agreed to enhance exchange of visits and information, especially at the private sector level and would sign an Investment Guarantee Agreement (IGA) when Iran's Trade Minister visited Malaysia.

Meanwhile, Rafidah is scheduled to give a speech at the Malaysia-Iran Trade seminar today which is expected to be attended by some 200 Iranian businessmen.

During Rafidah's visit, seventeen Malaysian companies represented by 24 businessmen are expected to conduct discussions with representatives from the Iranian trade and industry sector.

Rafidah also called on Iranian president Hojatoleslam Seyyed Mohammad Khatami where she conveyed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's invitation to the president to visit Malaysia. -- BERNAMA

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