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Malaysia to step up trade, diplomatic ties with Swaziland

Eirmalasang Bani

MALAYSIA and Swaziland have agreed to strengthen bilateral ties, in both trade and diplomatic affairs, through the implementation of exchange programmes, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi says.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has agreed to the Government offering various programmes, including administration and development courses, to Swaziland officials as requested by the south African country.

"Although trade between Malaysia and Swaziland is very small, it has good potential to be enhanced," Abdullah told reporters after a meeting between Dr Mahathir and King Mswati III of Swaziland in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Bilateral trade currently stands at only some RM3.2 million a year.

So far, 25 Swaziland officials have been trained in the country under programmes covering such areas as cooperation development, tax administration, public administration, health administration and broadcasting, the minister said.

King Mswati III is accompanied by his brother Prince Mahlaba, Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Albert H.N. Shabangu, High Commissioner to Malaysia Clifford S. Mamba, Investment Authority chairman Dr S.S. Nxumalo and several businessmen on his six-day state visit to Malaysia.

Malaysian and Swaziland businessmen will also be provided with opportunities to meet and learn about each other during the visit, Abdullah said, adding that there are currently no Malaysian investors in Swaziland.

After their meeting, King Mswati III and Dr Mahathir witnessed the signing of two agreements to step up trade, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation between the two countries. Abdullah represented Malaysia and his counterpart Shabangu signed for Swaziland.

Wisma Putra will be sending more brochures and information on the courses offered by the National Institute of Public Administration Malaysia and the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations to Swaziland, Abdullah said.

"Malaysia may be facing an economic slowdown but that does not stop us from increasing trade with new partners and improving relations with the existing ones," he said.

This strategy has earned the country a RM32.4 billion trade surplus in the first eight months of the year, which means the manufacturing industry remains robust and workers will not be laid off, the minister said.

It is therefore important that Malaysian businessmen support these efforts so that the country's economy will recover faster, he added.

"Companies can now be more active as chances getting loans are better than a few months back when the economic situation was at a critical stage."

Fixing the ringgit at 3.80 to the US dollar has also meant that businessmen and investors can budget and plan with greater certainty, Abdullah said.

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