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Malaysia-Eritrea pact paves way for better ties

MALAYSIA signed an economic, scientific, technical and cultural agreement with Eritrea yesterday, paving the way for greater co-operation with the African country which achieved independence five years ago.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and visiting Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki at the Prime Minister's Department in Kuala Lumpur.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik signed for Malaysia while Eritrea was represented by its Minister of Transport and Communication, Salih Kekia.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir and Afwerki held a delegation meeting which discussed areas to enhance economic and trade co-operation. Trade between both countries last year stood at RM1.1 million.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad said Malaysia had expressed its willingness to train Eritrean officials.

Under the South-South co-operation, Malaysia has trained some 4,000 officials from various countries.

Toyad said both leaders agreed on the importance of increasing ties and exploring business opportunities, taking into account the present economic difficulties in the region.

He added Afwerki had expressed a desire to learn more from Malaysia, especially its economic development programmes.

"He said Eritrea would like to see and learn the formulae used by Malaysia in successfully developing the country," Toyad said.

Afwerki has invited Malaysian businessmen to invest in his country, especially in the services industry.

Afwerki left for home tonight. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Othman, Toyad and several senior officials were at the KL International Airport in Sepang to see him off.

Prior to that, Afwerki had a farewell audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Ja'afar, at Istana Negara.

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