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Malaysia to study cultivation of oil palm in Sudan

Fauziah Ismail in Khartoum

KHARTOUM, Thurs: Malaysia is undertaking a study to see if oil palm can be cultivated in Sudan, which has 80 million hectares of land convertible into plantations.

Deputy Primary Industries Minister Datuk Hishamuddin Hussein said Tabung Haji, the Palm Oil Research of Malaysia and several Sudanese universities are conducting the study.

"We are looking at the long-term approach of our joint cooperation with Sudan. The cultivation of oil palm, besides undertaking downstream activities here, is one option," he told Malaysian newsmen following his meeting with Sudanese Industries Minister Badaruddin Sulaiman.

Hishamuddin is accompanying Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on a three-day official visit of Sudan, ending tomorrow.

Others in the Prime Minister's delegation include his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman and a 12-member business delegation.

To coincide with the visit, the two governments also signed three agreements to further enhance trade and investment cooperation between them.

Hishamuddin said Malaysia is also looking at countries in South America for the purpose of cultivating oil palm.

At present, the Malaysian private sector has already opened oil palm plantations in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

Hishamuddin said Sudan is also keen to secure Malaysia's Palm Oil Credit Payment Arrangement for the purchase of palm oil.

Sudan has been importing palm oil from Malaysia since 1981.

"We see potential in Sudan.

"We see for ourselves the situation here and it is no where near as bad as perceived by many.

"The fact that they (the Sudan Government) is comfortable with us, and giving priority to our investors, goes a long way towards strengthening our trade and investment cooperation," Hishamuddin said.

Meanwhile, shortly after his arrival last night, Dr Mahathir was conferred the honorary Doctorate of Laws by the University of Khartoum.

After attending the Malaysia-Sudan delegation meeting where he witnessed the signing of the three agreements, Dr Mahathir met Sudan First Vice-President Ali Osman Muhamed Taha and the president of the Coordination Council of the Southern Province and assistant to the president, Mr Riek Maachar.

Later, he met with Malaysian students and held a dialogue with Sudanese intellectuals and scholars.

Tomorrow, he is scheduled to open the Petronas office here before leaving for home in the afternoon.

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