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Teams to explore prospects in Djibouti: Abdullah

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MALAYSIA yesterday agreed to send delegations to be led by the trade and transport ministers to Djibouti to explore the country's potential for investment and forge collaboration between the two countries.

The petroleum and telecommunications sectors, light industries and the banking system are some of the possible areas that Malaysian companies can participate in helping Djibouti develop its economy, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday.

Abdullah, briefing reporters after a delegation meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Djibouti President El Hag Hassan Gouled Aptidon in Kuala Lumpur, said through the visits, Malaysia will be able to outline its investment programmes in that country.

"We have yet to fix the date for the visits but the Djibouti Government wants us to go there to explore investment potentials as soon as possible. The visits are limited to trade and transport because most of the projects discussed during the meetings were related to these areas," he added.

Aptidon arrived in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday for a nine-day state visit on the invitation of Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

Apart from these, Abdullah said infrastructure, agriculture, electricity generating and other services sector such as in the development of ports and airports are possible areas that Malaysians can participate in Djibouti's economic activities.

Abdullah also said although Djibouti, which is located in East Africa, has a population of less than two million, its advantage is its port facilities.

"Djibouti has port facilities compared to the neighbouring East African countries. Thus, they want us to provide port management training programmes for their people and serve the country as a gateway to East African countries," he added.

He said the Djibouti President also asked Malaysia to set up a free trade zone (FTZ) there to facilitate exports to the East African region, which has a potential market population of about 130 million.

"Djibouti is also offering Malaysia use of the FTZ as a depot to keep our goods before exporting them to other countries in the region," he added.

At the delegation meeting, Malaysia signed two agreements with Djibouti, as part of the efforts to strengthen relations between the two countries. The two agreements are the Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation, and the Investment Guarantee.

Abdullah signed the Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation Agreement on behalf of the Malaysian Government while Djibouti was represented by its Commerce and Industry Minister Mohamed Barkat Abdilahi.

Abdilahi also signed the Investment Guarantee Agreement (IGA) with International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

Djibouti is the 64th country to sign the IGA with Malaysia.

Malaysia's bilateral trade with Djibouti totalled RM13.76 million last year. In the first five months of this year, two-way trade amounted to RM4.95 million. For 1997, exports from Malaysia to Djibouti amounted to RM13.68 million, with palm oil, furniture and parts, fabrics and sags as well as bags of plastics constituted 89.72 per cent of the total.

On the converse, Malaysia's imports from Djibouti in 1997 amounted to

RM74,000, with synthetic fibres accounting for 94 per cent of the total imports.

Bernama reports: Aptidon was accorded an official welcome at Parliament Square yesterday.

Dr Mahathir and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, who is the minister-in-attendance, were also present.

The ceremony was highlighted by the customary playing of the national anthems of the two countries, a 21-gun salute and President Aptidon inspecting a guard-of-honour mounted by officers and men of the 1st Battalion Royal Malay Regiment.

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