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ASIA AFRICA-FORUM

ASIA-AFRICA FORUM ATTRACTS OVER 250 PARTICIPANTS

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 4 (Bernama) -- More than 250 participants from Africa and Asia have confirmed their participation in the first Asia-Africa Business Forum (AABF) to be held from Oct 25-29 in Kuala Lumpur.

Financed by the Government of Japan, the AABF is a private-sector led event organised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with the government of Malaysia, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) of the World Bank Group, and the Malaysia South-South Corporation Bhd (MASSCORP).

Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is expected to address the forum.

The main objective of the AABF is to promote trade and investment between the two regions which will hopefully widen the scope of Asia-Africa cooperation, thus opening a doorway to further African development.

UNDP resident representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, Philips Young, told a press conference here today that AABF was doing its best to get the business people from two different continents together in order to encourage and promote investment and trade.

"The AABF is a highly focussed forum where African and Asian businesses with mutual interests can meet, interact and establish strategic business alliances," he said.

While traditional business ties of African countries were with Europe, Young said that the former were also keen to extend their ties to include Asia.

Therefore, the strengthening of Asia-Africa cooperation would be vital for the development of the private sectors, he added.

He said the launch of this initiative would contribute towards a win-win situation which would include a beneficial exchange of knowledge and expertise among the two countries.

While providing opportunities for Africa to increase its Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) into Asia, he said, AABF would also provide the necessary trade links.

Young said that he was very fortunate that the Government of Japan has been the major player in encouraging the developing countries of Africa and Asia to foster their private sectors' relationships through a kind of south-south development process.

Japan is providing a hefty sum of US\$1.5 million towards organising this forum.

Datuk J. Jegathesan, a consultant to MIGA, one of AABF's organisers, said in 1997, FDI worldwide grew by 19 percent to US\$400 billion (US\$1=RM3.80) of which US\$149 billion went to developing countries. Of this US\$149 billion, US\$6.4 billion went to Africa.

"I consider Africa as an emerging continent in the new century and the next profit and growth centre," he said.

Jegathesan said Malaysia had invested some RM1.248 billion in Africa in 1996 mainly in Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa and Sudan.

However, Malaysian investments to Africa declined to RM414 million in 1997 and RM302 million in 1998 mainly due to the economic crisis, he said.

-- BERNAMA

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