

Cross-border trade with Manila to be stepped up

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By LOKMAN MANSOR

THE fourth meeting of the Malaysia-Philippines Joint Commission ended yesterday with both countries agreeing to jump start cross-border investments, which stalled following the regional economic crisis.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said trade and investment between the two countries went through a downturn during the crisis, and some Malaysian companies operating in the Philippines suffered as a result.

"We agreed that now is the time to revisit some of the areas involved and see how we can get them started again, as well as further increase investments," he said at a joint press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Also present was Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Domingo Siazon, who led the Philippine delegation to the three-day meeting. Both ministers earlier signed the official minutes of the meeting. The last time the Malaysia-Philippines Joint Commission met was in May 1996.

There are 45 Malaysian companies operating in the Philippines and some of them continue to face problems, Syed Hamid said, adding that Malaysia welcomes the Philippines' plan to amend some of its laws to make it more flexible for foreign investors.

He said the meeting also discussed Malaysia's assistance in the socio-economic advancement of Muslim Filipinos in Min-

PHILIPPINE President Joseph Estrada proposes to make an official visit to Malaysia to strengthen bilateral ties, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said yesterday.

He said Estrada's intention was conveyed to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad by Philippine Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon when he called on the Prime Minister at his office, in Putrajaya.

The date and itinerary for Estrada's visit will be arranged as soon as possible, Syed Hamid told reporters after the call.

Siazon is here to attend the fourth Malaysia-Philippines Joint Commission Meeting. — Bernama

danao, with Siazon inviting more Malaysian companies to invest there.

"What we want to see is security, stability, and sufficient facilities and infrastructure to enable us to move forward," Syed Hamid said.

He said Malaysia has already helped Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao with Islamic banking, haj activities, providing placements for their students at the International Islamic University, and investments in palm oil.

In addition to its embassy in Manila, Malaysia also has a consulate in Davao, Mindanao, to assist Malaysian businesses operating there.

Siazon said the Philippines also has plans to open a consulate in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, to cater for the large number of Filipinos working in the state.

"There is already an allocation in my ministry's budget for the consulate, but the actual implementation will depend on a consensus reached by our legislators," he added.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia welcomes the setting

up of the consulate, as there are many consulate matters to address which might be difficult to do from the embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

"There are a lot of Filipinos in Sabah (estimated to number at least 100,000). Whenever they (the Philippines) want to open the consulate, we welcome them," he added.

Other bilateral issues discussed at the meeting included border cooperation, tourism and culture, agriculture, health, education, information and the environment.

Earlier, both Syed Hamid and Siazon described the three-day meeting as friendly, productive, and resulting in concrete measures that will push forward bilateral relations.

"The potential is great to improve our relations further, and we welcome the generous offers of assistance by Malaysia. This meeting will have a positive impact on our relations and for Asean as a whole," Siazon said.