

Iraq keen to buy Malaysian cars, commercial vehicles

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By **ARIFF AWANG**

IRAQ has expressed an interest in importing Malaysian cars as well as other commercial vehicles to cater to the growing demand for passenger and commercial transportation in the country.

Iraqi Trade Minister Dr Mohammad Mahdi Salih said the agreement on importing national cars will be finalised soon as the parties involved are in the process of finalising the deal.

It is not immediately known which national cars Proton or Perodua that the Iraqis are interested to import from Malaysia however, sample units of the national cars have already been sent to the country for testing purpose.

"Initially Iraq is said to have to agree to buy some thousand units of national cars but the details on the purchase agreement have yet to be disclosed," International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said after having discussions with the Iraqi delegation which made a courtesy call at the ministry in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The Iraqi delegation, headed by M'ahdi Salih, consists of his ministry's secretary, Saadi Mahdi Salah, Iraqi Ambassador to Malaysia Adnan Malik Al-Ghazali and State Company of Grains director general Yousuf Abdul Rahman.

They are scheduled to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

Apart from touring steel mills in the country, the delegation will also visit Proton and Perodua manufacturing plants in Shah Alam and Rawang respectively.

Rafidah said Iraq needs some 600,000 vehicles and it prefers Malaysia to be involved in the country's automotive sector on a long term basis.

"They are not only looking for passenger vehicles but also commercial vehicles including trucks and buses."

In line with this, Rafidah urged Malaysian companies to tie-up and export the required number of vehicles that Iraq needs so that the standard and quality of the products are ensured.

"This cannot be done effectively by a single company."

For the first 10 months of the year (January to October 2000) the value of bilateral trade between Malaysia and Iraq stood at US\$61.5 million (US\$1 = RM3.80). The trade balance is more in favour of Malaysia where the country exports more.

The main exports items to Iraq in 1999 include margarine and shortening, soap, cleansing and polishing preparations, medicinal and pharmaceutical products, radio, textile and leather, and machinery derivatives.