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Colombia-Malaysia

COLOMBIA KEEN TO LEARN AGRO-INDUSTRY FROM MALAYSIA

By: Harlina Samson

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 28 (Bernama) -- Colombia, one of Latin America's fast-emerging economies, wants to learn more about Malaysia's agro-industry programmes to expand its palm oil industry.

Colombian Ambassador to Malaysia Arturo Infante Villarreal said Malaysia had vast expertise and know-how in the palm oil industry and this would help Colombia in expanding its commodity industry.

He said Colombia was also keen to learn about Malaysia's rural and land development programmes such as Felda and Felcra land schemes in enabling the poor to own properties and enjoy the country's wealth.

"We want to look carefully at the Felda and Felcra land schemes and the idea of large oil palm plantations where the social programme of bringing property and wealth to the poor in rural areas is included.

"We have to do something like that in Colombia and we have a large extension of land which are not being used in the best possible way in terms of economic and social use," he told BERNAMA in an interview today, ahead of the four-day state visit by Colombian President Andres Pastrana Arango to Malaysia, beginning tomorrow.

Pastrana will be accompanied by his wife and a 60-member delegation comprising Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, Agriculture and Education as well as senior officials and members of the private sector.

Infante said Colombia also wants Malaysia to send a technical team to study the different aspects of the industry for massive oil palm planting.

"We have a development plan and expect to expand to 800,000 hectares in the next 10 years. We can benefit a lot with the cooperation of Malaysia on how to plant oil palm in large areas and on a large scale," he said.

On Pastrana's visit, he said it was the first by a Colombian President to strengthen linkages and cooperation in many areas between the two countries.

He said Pastrana would discuss specific topics of interest with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and other leaders in different areas, mainly on the palm oil industry, information technology and joint-venture programmes in the oil and petroleum industry.

Infante said Colombia was also looking for a joint venture with Petronas, Malaysia's national petroleum company, for an oil exploration project with the Colombian state oil company, Ecopetrol.

"That will be quite interesting in the sense that it will be the first time that we do an association with a state holding company. We have done it with many of the big petroleum companies but not for a foreign exploration looking for oil with the state company, this is the first time," he said.

In other areas of trade and investment, he said Colombia was looking for a possible contact in the information technology and education sectors.

"So far, we have very little contact between our universities and Malaysian universities. We should explore this in detail because there are many possibilities in the area," he said.

Describing Malaysia as the best example in terms of value-added industries, Infante said Malaysia had managed to create an efficient and huge value-added industry.

He said Malaysia's strategy in organising the industries had enabled the country to export more as compared to Colombia whose total exports stood at US\$13 billion.

"You bring in components and work on the components, process them and sell them again. Malaysia is doing that in a massive way.

"It shows Malaysia's strategy in terms of organising its industries is very attractive and since ours is to be expanded, we have to learn how and what you are doing," he said.

Infante said a cooperation agreement between Colombia and Malaysia would be signed to enable both countries to work on specific and different areas.

On bilateral trade between Colombia and Malaysia, he said it was very little, amounting to only RM13 million last year.

Colombia imported rubber products and electrical appliances and exported pharmaceutical products, fertilizers, chemicals and artificial teeth.

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