

22/01/2001

Looking for suitable SMI partners

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KUALA KANGSAR, Sun. - The International Trade and Industry Ministry's mission to Japan in April will, among others, focus on match-making for local companies with small-scale industries in Japan, Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said today.

Interested local companies should join the trade delegation to look for suitable partners and set up joint ventures, she told reporters at her open house for Kuala Kangsar constituents at Clifford School here today.

Rafidah, who is Kuala Kangsar MP, said most backyard industries in Japan were reluctant to relocate their operations to Malaysia as they did not want to leave their home towns.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday invited small-scale industries from Japan which are facing difficulty in finding people to run them, to relocate their operations to Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir who was on a visit to Osaka, Japan, said the sophisticated small companies which supplied components to big manufacturers were not doomed economically, but many of them could not carry on as the owners' children were just not interested in taking over the business.

Rafidah said she would hold dialogues with the companies' owners during her visit to Japan in April and, at the same time, introduce them to local companies from the small and medium-scale industries.

"The meeting between prospective partners is very important as they want to develop trust between them. It's very difficult for the owners simply to hand over their companies to others, especially to foreigners."

Rafidah suggested that in the initial stage, local companies should let their Japanese partners hold majority stake in the joint-venture companies.

"I do not think that it is appropriate for us to hold the majority stake as the Japanese own the technology and products. We should learn from them first."

Meanwhile, commenting on the Philippines, she said Malaysia would focus on improving bilateral trade and investment with that country.

Rafidah said with the appointment of Vice-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as the new President, the Asean economy could be further strengthened.

A stable Asean was needed in preparation for the Asean Free Trade Area in 2003 and other economic programmes in the region.

Rafidah, who is Umno Wanita chief, congratulated Arroyo on her appointment and hoped that she could improve the Philippines' economy.

"Wanita Umno is happy with her appointment but not just because she is a woman. In my opinion Arroyo was appointed not based on gender, but because of her capability and support from her party."

"Coincidentally, she is a woman and we in Wanita Umno are proud of the fact (that a woman is leading a country)," she said.

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