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Interview-Yemen

SANA'A-KL TIES SET TO SOAR WITH DR MAHATHIR'S VISIT TO YEMEN

By: Abdul Muin Abdul Majid

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 1 (Bernama) -- The visit by the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Yemen in the middle of this month is set to open up avenues for future cooperation between Sana'a and Kuala Lumpur as the West Asian country charts its strategies for growth and development.

In stating this, the Yemeni Foreign Minister Dr Abubaker Al-Qirbi said Yemen, a country of some 20 million people, was keen to learn from Malaysia which his country regarded as one of the examples of success in the Muslim world.

"We feel that Muslim countries which are in the stage of development like Yemen should look at Malaysia as an example for their future development policies and planning," he told Bernama in an interview here.

Dr Abubaker said many Yemenis especially policy-makers were looking forward to the visit to enable them exchange views with Dr Mahathir and members of his delegation that could lead to mutual cooperation in economic, cultural or education fields, among others.

He said it was hoped that two agreements would be signed, one relating to the establishment of the Yemen-Malaysia Joint Commission to be headed by the respective foreign ministers, and the other, in the area of civil service cooperation and training.

"We hope that the first meeting (of the joint commission) will be held in Sana'a and that we hope to have a number of Malaysian ministers participating to enhance and push forward cooperation between our two countries," he said.

On how economic linkages between the countries could be improved, Dr Abubaker said potential Malaysian investors should come and conduct feasibility studies on possible trade ventures, including by looking at surrounding markets in Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Tanzania.

He said Malaysia could take advantage of the strategic location of the port city of Aden on the Red Sea where the Yemeni government had taken measures to develop an area known as the Aden Trade Zone.

It is reported that some 31,000 ha of land surrounding the city have been earmarked for this purpose.

"It is not only for trade but also manufacturing, industry and many companies now have come to set up base in this area. We hope that Malaysia will capitalise on this because Aden can easily be the gateway to East Africa from Sudan down to Tanzania and even Madagascar," he said.

Dr Abubaker said the government had also passed a number of legislations with the view of protecting investors in Yemen and pledged that Sana'a would provide all the support and security needed.

"I think Aden can be a real haven for investors from anywhere in the world but we'd prefer that our Muslim partners take advantage of it before others do," he added.

Yemen, he said, had a vast potential in the tourism sector with its superb historical sites and geographical attractions.

"These have not been really exploited till now and unfortunately some of the security incidents have affected our tourism industry. But Yemen is putting a lot of effort to encourage companies that are interested in this area," he added.

The foreign minister also expressed hope that Yemen Air would fly to Malaysia "in the very near future" as direct air links could facilitate cooperation and making it easier for businessmen to travel between the two

countries.

Turning to the question of how the government was countering negative portrayal of Yemen, he said there was a lot of exaggeration as far as the issue of instability in his country was concerned.

He said since the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, the country had gone through many economic, social and political difficulties.

"But I think this is all behind us now. I think Yemen now is a very stable country and that security in Yemen is as good as any other country in the world. One must realise that Yemen's tribal system creates problems which I think will be resolved through development and education," he said.

Dr Abubaker said the Yemeni government was putting a lot of efforts into trying to ensure that there was equity and development in all parts of Yemen.

"And we hope that this is our remedy for bad reporting about Yemen in certain media," he added.

Nevertheless, he said most people who had actually visited the country would only have fond memories of their stay as the Yemeni people were friendly and would welcome visitors from any part of the world, be they Muslims or non-Muslims.

"Hospitality is the nature of the Yemenis. We are looking forward to the visit by Dr Mahathir and all his colleagues and businessmen who will accompany him because we look at Malaysia as a future partner for Yemen.

"We hope they'll enjoy their stay with us and from there, we can move forward to a closer and stronger cooperation between our two countries," Dr Abubaker said.

He described Dr Mahathir as a man of vision and a leader who felt a deep sense of commitment to Malaysia and the Muslim world.

"I don't think his vision is really to upset the West. He is a man who wants to develop his country including by ensuring its economic independence. He has his own views of democracy and does not feel that these matters should be dictated from the outside," he added.

-- BERNAMA

MAM AHH RYN