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Sudan offers abundant scope for investment

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SUDAN and Malaysia had established contacts with each other since their respective independence, and both countries are also currently actively involved in world forums such as the Non-Alligned Movement and the Organisation of the Islamic Countries.

Sudan officially opened its embassy in Kuala Lumpur in December 1990 and President Omar el-Bashir paid a visit to Malaysia in June 1991.

The visit was the first by a Sudanese President to Malaysia. Visits of high ranking officials from both countries have continued. The Honourable Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad visited Sudan in 1998.

Such visits have contributed significantly to the strengthening of our bilateral relations namely in trade, politics and education which have improved remarkably.

Malaysia, on the other hand, set up its embassy in Khartoum in 1999 and upgraded it to an ambassadorial level at the end of 2000.

Our cooperations have been quite successful so far. The involvement of Petronas is the most sweet success story for us.

With Petronas expertise, Sudan has emerged as an oil power in July 1999 with the capacity of producing 210,000 barrels per day (bpd). With the huge oil reserves, investors in this sector are assured of splendid profit margins.

Even today, the oil and gas sector is only 15 per cent exploited. With the discovery of new oil fields, the industry is expected to turn around the Sudanese economy in the years to come. In fact, our economy is going much stronger than expected.

Oil has already generated a flurry of activities in a country rich with its natural resources namely water, agricultural products, mining and livestock.

The Sudanese Government is also encouraging investment in these areas by embarking on a vigorous privatization programme and offering attractive incentives (that is, 15 years tax holidays) to investors.

Malaysian companies are encouraged to participate in these areas. With compatible incentives as in any other developing countries, Sudan offers one of the best investment packages in the region.

Opportunities are abundance in projects such as power generation, road building, ports, airports and agro-related activities for value-added products. At the same time, industrialisation remains active and attractive.

There is a good base for such activities and Sudan has just surprised many by producing its first national car.

It doesnt stop there. As development progresses, Sudan needs more than what it needed many years ago. Housing and other infrastructures are another sector in which Malaysian and foreign investors should invest.

As for today, I am glad that Malaysian companies like Petronas, the Muhibah Group, Advance Synergy and Malaysian Mining Corp have played an important part in helping us to prosper.

There are the ones responsible for setting the precedence in an internationally-organised effort to change the adverse global impression about Sudan.

Our country is considered the largest African nation (2.5 million sq km). It occupies 8.3 per cent of the African continent.

Sudan is 10 times larger than the UK, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal,

Belgium, Sweden and Norway combined. It is bordered by Egypt, Libya, Chad, Central Africa, Congo, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea and shares a coastline of 750km of the Red Sea with Saudi Arabia in the east.

The country is the cradle of two most ancient civilisations namely the Napatan and Meroe which flourished between 750BC and 350AD. The two civilisations constituted the 25th Dynasty of Egypt.

However, they remained distinctly Sudanese with their own burial sites, pyramids and language. Meroetic pottery was considered among the finest and the Meroe was known to be the first civilisation to introduce iron mining, which was a pure African industry.

Sudan also witnessed a flourishing era of the early Byzantine Christianity (542AD-1340AD) and there are numerous ruins of churches and castles in the Northern Region on the banks of the Nile river.

The coming of Islam (650AD) gave rise to a number of small kingdoms and has greatly influenced the life and culture of the people. The Islamic influence came from the East as early as the Migration of the Prophet's Companions and from the North (The Mission of Amro Ibn El Ass) and at a later times from the North African countries (The Maghrib).

Due to these blends of religions and cultures, Sudan today is inhabited by more than a hundred ethnological groups who exhibit a diversified cultures, music, languages and arts, all of whom live side by side with each other and they all enrich the Sudanese character.

We gained Independence from the British a bit earlier than Malaysia, on January 1 1956 and since then had observed both civilian and military rules with little stability.

The current Government has managed to pass a Constitution in 1999 and embarked on a reconciliation programme which united various political groups under the National Agenda for Peace and Development.

The programme is aimed at establishing stability in the country, which has so far helped to boost the economy.

President El-Bashir who has been just given a new 5-year term of office by a 86.5 per cent majority mandate in the recent elections, has pledged to work harder for peace, development and political stability in the country.

Sudan today is a resilient society. Although some adverse reports about the country was highlighted by the foreign press, especially the West, more and more investors are coming to the country, including from Europe.

With the economy registering a gross domestic product (GDP) growth of above 6 per cent over the past few years - with forecast for next year to be around 7 per cent - Sudan promises nothing but the well-being of the foreign investors in the country.

As the saying goes - seeing is believing - I would like to further extend a warm invitation to Malaysian investors to explore the abundance of business opportunities in Sudan.

I do hope that as far as the relationship between our two countries goes, we will both benefit fully from our hard work and efforts to keep our strong and friendly ties intact.

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