

16 AUG 2002

BUSINESS-SINGAPORE

KEEP M'SIA-SINGAPORE BUSINESS RELATIONS GOING, SAYS RAFIDAH

By: Siti Hawa Othman

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 16 (Bernama) -- The business relationship between Malaysia and Singapore must go on even if political relations are not at optimal level, Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said today.

Citing the tensions between China and Taiwan, she pointed out that the situation had not hindered Taiwan from investing massively in China.

"Business transcends politics. Living in the world of competition, the business community must think and make rational business decisions and politics should be factored in as a matter of cost.

"You don't need political goading. We (the government) are there to facilitate..," she said during a dialogue session with the Singaporean members of the Malaysia-Singapore Roundtable at her ministry here.

The Minister said Malaysia and Singapore had a solid business relationship with Singapore being Malaysia's third largest trading partner, second largest export nation and third largest source of imports.

For January-June 2002, total trade between Malaysia-Singapore declined by 0.2 percent but trade had grown steadily since 1995 by 49.2 percent from RM16.2 billion then to RM24.2 billion last year.

There were also strong investments from Singapore between 1997 and June 2002, where 759 manufacturing projects worth RM7.581 billion were approved, of which 401 were new projects. On the other hand, Malaysia invested RM10.5 billion in Singapore during the said period, mostly in services.

Meanwhile, 60 business leaders from Malaysia and Singapore are currently participating in a three-day Malaysia-Singapore Roundtable, co-organised by the Asian Strategic and Leadership Institute (ASLI), the Singapore Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the Asean Business Forum.

The highlights for the participants included calling on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and Rafidah. The delegation was also briefed by the National Economic Action Committee (NEAC) and Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC) officials.

IPS director and Singapore's Ambassador-at-Large Professor Tommy Koh told reporters after the dialogue that the prime minister and ministers had indicated that Singapore businessmen were welcome in Malaysia no matter what state political relations between the two countries was in.

He said the fact that the Singapore delegation was accompanied by its Minister for the Environment Lim Swee Say was proof of Singapore government's strong support for this initiative to deepen the business relationship between both countries.

During the visit, the Roundtable members had discussed various aspects of bilateral business relations, possible areas for business cooperation and others.

The Roundtable had also identified specific areas for closer cooperation such as tourism, ICT, eastern medicine, research and life sciences, finance, publishing and small and medium scale enterprises (SME).

Koh said more regular meetings were needed as some participants pointed out that the two countries seemed to suffer from a "blind spot" with regards to each other.

He said delegates also felt that both sides of the Causeway held some negative perceptions of each other and these were largely due to a lack of understanding caused by insufficient communications.

To overcome the gap, he said there were suggestions that more opportunities be created for Malaysians and Singaporeans at different levels and sectors to interact and learn from each other.

"There are areas in which Malaysia and Singapore will compete, just as there are areas in which the two countries can complement and cooperate with each other. What is required, is a healthy attitude towards competition and cooperation," Koh added.

He said the business community recommended more enhanced communications between Malaysia and Singapore and also appealed to the media of both countries to report in a fair and balanced manner without emphasizing on the negativity.-- BERNAMA

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