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North Korea's energy sector beckons

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - North Korea has invited Malaysian companies to avail themselves of opportunities in the energy, petroleum and information technology sectors in that country.

The offer was made by North Korea's visiting President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, Kim Yong-nam, at the meeting between his delegation and a Malaysian delegation headed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Putrajaya today.

"North Korea said they have energy resources that have not been explored fully and invited Malaysian companies to explore these and other areas," acting Foreign Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid said at a Press conference after the meeting.

He said both sides agreed to increase bilateral trade which now totalled RM31 million.

Kim, 75, is here on a three-day state visit to expand bilateral ties with Malaysia. He is North Korea's highest-ranking leader to visit Malaysia since diplomatic ties were established in 1973.

Azmi said Dr Mahathir accepted Kim's invitation to visit North Korea and strongly supported efforts for reunification of North and South Korea.

Two agreements were signed by Malaysia and North Korea today - the Palm Oil Credit Payment Arrangement (Pocpa) agreement for US\$10 million (RM38 million) and an agreement on cultural ties.

Azmi said Malaysia agreed that payment under the Pocpa could be made by way of barter trade and that today's agreement was the second, after the first one in December 2000 for a similar amount had been utilised.

Asked if United States President George W. Bush's statement about North Korea being part of an "axis of evil" was discussed, Azmi said it was, but discussions centred more on economic co-operation.

"North Korea agreed with Malaysia's stand on terrorism, that its root cause has to be found.

"Once the root cause is identified, then the question of an axis of evil is a non-issue."

Azmi added that that was why Malaysia was promoting an international forum on terrorism.

He said the significance of the visit was to strengthen bilateral ties established after Dr Mahathir first visited North Korea in 1979.

"The world situation has changed and North Korea is opening itself up to make more friends around the world and be part of the international community."

He said North Koreans were being trained here in languages, banking and veterinarian sciences, and that North Korea had asked for agreements on scientific and technology research to be signed.

Earlier in the morning, Kim was accorded a State welcome at Parliament Square.

The North Korean leader was met by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail on his arrival at 10.20am. Dr Mahathir was also present.

Kim inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by four officers and 103 men of the 1st Battalion, Royal Malay Regiment, under the command of Mejar Abu Samah Md Noh.

The Royal Armour Band was in attendance and a 21-gun salute was fired. Kim, accompanied by the King, later drove to Hotel Istana.

Dr Mahathir had a 30-minute meeting with Kim at the hotel.
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