

12 AUG 2002
TIMOR-MALAYSIA
TIMOR LOOKS TO MSIA FOR GUIDANCE IN DEVELOPMENT

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 12 (Bernama) -- The newly-independent nation of Timor Lorosae is looking to Malaysia to help in its socio-economic development as it regards the latter as the best model for development planning and resource management.

An agricultural nation with largely rich untapped oil and gas resources, the country is looking for cooperative ventures with Malaysia in as many areas as possible, its Prime Minister, Dr Mari Amude Alkatiri, said today.

Dr Mari, who arrived here yesterday leading a 27-member high-level delegation to Malaysia including 17 businessmen, made these comments during a meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Dr Mahathir Mohamad here.

Briefing reporters on the outcome of the more than one hour meeting, Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad, said Malaysia was willing to assist Timor Lorosae in education, industrial development, agriculture, health as well as joint ventures in the oil and gas industry through Petronas.

Besides this, Malaysia has already and will provide further training of the police and military forces of the new democratic republic which has a populace of about 800,000 people.

In a 1999 referendum, Timor Lorosae, then known as Timor Timur or East Timor, voted to secede from Indonesia which had annexed it on July 16, 1976.

The United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) governed the territory from 1999 until nationhood was declared on May 20, 2002.

Its capital and largest city is Dili which has a population of 65,000 while the country's economy is primarily based on fishing and farming with unemployment at 70 percent.

Its natural resources include offshore oil and gas, while its exports comprise coffee, oil and natural gas, timber, fish, spices, coconuts and cacao while its major trading partners are Australia and Portugal.

Minister of International Trade and Industry, Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, when met on the sidelines of the meeting, said Malaysia would look to helping the former Indonesian colony through investments in downstream and export oriented sectors.

She said the country also sought consultations with Petronas for assistance in setting up infrastructure facilities to help develop its oil and gas sector.

Rafidah said Malaysia would also offer whatever experience it had in setting up a government administration, infrastructure, investments and industry.

She said that the Timor side had proposed to set up a joint administrative and economic commission to follow up on these efforts.

Malaysia will also help them out in setting up their embassy here, she added.

As for trade, she said Malaysians were already present in Timor but on a very small scale.

MITI, she said would offer the services of the Malaysia Industrial Development Authority (MIDA) and Malaysian External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) to set up and investment rules and laws that Timor had yet to develop.

She said it was of special significance for Dr Mari to pick Malaysia for his first overseas visit after gaining independence.

Meanwhile Toyad said assistance from Malaysia will be in the form of training in administration, information and development efforts through National Institute for Public Administration (INTAN) and Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR).

It will also include providing facilities for higher education, scholarships and grooming Timorese students for administrative and development workforce.

-- BERNAMA

SHO KTC