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Syria-Relations  
MALAYSIA-SYRIA RELATIONS CONTINUE TO GROW

By: Mohd Zahari Morad

DAMASCUS, May 5 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's relations with Syria continue to grow in various fields particularly after the opening of its embassy here two years ago, said the country's ambassador here Datuk Abdullah Sani Omar.

He said Malaysia established diplomatic relations with Syria in 1958 but a resident embassy was opened here only in 2002.

Relations between the two countries who are members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) became even closer following the visit of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in August last year.

There was still room for expanded cooperation in trade, tourism education and research, he told the Malaysian press corps now here to cover the state visit of Their Majesties the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and the Raja Permaisuri Agong who arrive here tomorrow.

Trade between the two countries amounted to just RM587.9 million last year and with the balance of trade in Malaysia's favour.

Malaysia's exports to Syria were mainly palm oil and wooden furniture.

Malaysia imported only RM1.5 million worth of cotton and spices from Syria last year, the ambassador said.

Sani who is Malaysia's first resident ambassador here, said there was much potential for Malaysian investors here such as in the ICT sector.

Syria looked upon Malaysia as a model Islamic nation in the area of development and moreover Syria occupied a strategic location which could be the gateway for the West Asian market, he said.

He said Malaysian investors could take advantage of the efforts of the Syrian Government to develop its ICT industry.

Malaysia so far is involved in a number of ICT projects in Syria such as through the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC) which had

implemented the Smart School project in two schools on a pilot basis.

The MDC was also involved in the development of the Smart Card for the Tax Department of the Syrian Ministry of Finance and through a consortium of Malaysian and Syrian companies, the MDC would upgrade the computer system of the Syrian Customs Department.

Sani also said a Malaysian company had shown interest in developing a monorail project in Syria at a cost of RM300 million.

He said Malaysian investors could also build hotels in Syria while tour packages could also be organised for Malaysians to visit Syria which was rich in Islamic Civilisation.

He said Malaysia's Multimedia University was helping the Syrian Government to set up a similar university in this country while 300 Malaysians were pursuing tertiary education in Syria.

The ambassador said Malaysians in Syria and the people of Syria were looking forward to the state visit of Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Tuanku Syed Putra Jamalullail and Tuanku Fauziah Tengku Abdul Rashid. This is their first state visit to Syria.

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