

26/02/2004

Kuwaiti Airways likely to resume flights to KLIA

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Kuwaiti Airways is likely to resume flights to the KL International Airport by June, Kuwait ambassador designate to Malaysia AbdulHamid Al-Failakawi said yesterday.

"For now, I do not have details on flight frequency as a feasibility study is being done on this.

"But discussions are underway," he said, adding that there was potential for the airline to expand in the Southeast Asian region.

AbdulHamid was speaking to the New Straits Times in conjunction with Kuwait's National Day celebration today as well as Liberation Day tomorrow.

Kuwaiti Airways stopped flying into the KLIA about two years ago, said AbdulHamid who has been in Malaysia for 11 days now.

"I want to see a brighter future in Malaysian-Kuwaiti relations. Previously, my government had been very busy with the Saddam Hussein regime and our foreign policy was very much focused on that.

"Now we are focused on economic diplomacy and Malaysia will be one of our models," he said.

AbdulHamid hoped to continue building on the good relationship enjoyed by both countries.

"I hope to bring Kuwaiti and Malaysian businessmen together to discuss possible joint ventures and investment opportunities in our countries as well as to set up joint ventures in third countries," he said.

He said the Kuwaiti Government was also reviewing laws to attract more countries to do business in the country.

Asked on opportunities for Malaysian investors in Kuwait, Abdul-Hamid said two of the biggest sectors were petroleum and infrastructure.

"We forecast our economy to grow by leaps and bounds in the next few years. There are plenty of opportunities," he said, adding that Malaysia-Kuwait bilateral trade which stood at US\$150 million (RM570 million) was "small".

AbdulHamid said bilateral trade could also be enhanced as there were many unexplored opportunities.

"I know for a fact that Malaysian goods have a good market in the Middle East and Malaysia has a good trade exchange programme with Morocco in particular, as well as other nations in that region.

"We hope to work on this too," he said, adding that he was confident this would be further enhanced under the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

AbdulHamid said Malaysia and Kuwait could also enhance the relationship as both headed regional as well as international groupings.

Malaysia is the chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of Islamic Conference while Kuwait presides at the Gulf Co-operation Council.

Asked on the relevance of the OIC, AbdulHamid said the conference would continue to discuss and find solutions to issues affecting Islamic nations.

"To agree and disagree on issues is normal. Such things happen in every regional and international grouping. On the whole, the OIC is very relevant and has been successful," he said.

Abdul Hamid also said Malaysia had achieved rapid development under the leadership of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Citing an example, he said the captain of a Kuwaiti team who had participated in a sports event in Kuala Lumpur recently was amazed to see Malaysia's transformation in slightly over two decades.

"The last time the captain came here was 22 years ago. So I told him that what he saw then was when Dr Mahathir had just become Prime Minister and what he saw today was just after his retirement."

Asked on Kuwait's views of Malaysia's objection to the presence of US troops in Iraq, AbdulHamid said his Government would also like to see the American troops leave as promised on June 30.

The Kuwaiti Government also hoped to see the United Nations play a bigger role in postwar Iraq, he added.