

Exporting our expertise

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MALAYSIA'S petroleum and construction industries may get a boost from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's first official visit to this small island nation.

Following meetings between Abdullah, his counterpart Portia Simpson Miller and their delegations here yesterday, both leaders agreed on potential co-operation in these and other sectors.

"We have agreed to explore the opportunities for additional supplies of liquefied natural gas, as well as offshore petroleum exploration, in the face of ever-increasing energy costs," Miller said at a joint Press conference.

Abdullah said Jamaican officials and Petronas would meet soon to discuss further details.

Jamaica spent over US\$1 billion (RM3.62 billion) last year on its energy bill and expects energy demand to grow three to four per cent a year. The country depends on imported oil for over 90 per cent of its energy needs.

Exploration activities in Jamaica have occurred in two phases — from 1955 to 1973 by private companies, and from 1978 to 1982 by the Petroleum Corporation of Jamaica (PCJ).

To date, no commercial reserves of oil and gas have been found in Jamaican territory, although oil and gas showed up in 10 wells. With advancements in geological sciences over the past 20 years, Jamaica is undertaking a new exploration phase.

PCJ recently invited exploration companies to bid on one or more of 24 blocks being offered, four onshore and 20 offshore, and is negotiating with firms that have tendered.



Abdullah with Miller (right), Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed (left) and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu on Tuesday. — Bernama picture



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In construction, meanwhile, Malaysia is interested in providing services in low-cost housing and road infrastructure.

Malaysia has already provided technical expertise to Jamaica for a 230km highway project in Montego Bay.

"We hope Malaysian companies will have other opportunities to participate in the development of Jamaica's economy, especially in the tourism industry, road construction, housing and other infrastructure development," Ab-

dullah said.

On education, he said, Jamaica had accepted Malaysia's request for more places for its students at the University of West Indies, particularly in its medical faculty.

In sports, Malaysia and Jamaica are to agree on a memorandum of understanding that would include co-operation in the areas of track and field and netball, which are Jamaica's expertise, and in badminton and squash, in which Malaysia has achieved international distinction.

Other collaborative opportunities include the agriculture sector, especially in combating the yellowing disease that is affecting the Jamaican coconut industry.

"Such collaboration would include the procurement of germ plasma from Malaysia for Jamaica's coconut replanting and rehabilitation programme," Miller added.

"In the field of commerce, although the current volume of bilateral trade is still small, I believe there is immense potential for increasing the quantum," Abdullah said at the official dinner last night.

He said Malaysia could be Jamaica's gateway to Asean, which has a combined population of 500 million, while Jamaica could be the hub for Malaysian exports to the Caribbean Single Market (CSM).