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Malaysia, Thailand can work together on halal business

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BANGKOK: Southern Thailand and the northern part of peninsular Malaysia can join forces to create a viable international halal business environment as a win-win situation for both sides.

Southern Thailand could be the source of basic and raw materials while the Malaysian states in the north could provide the capacity and expertise in the manufacturing sector, a combination that could spur a strong industrial base for halal products and services.

This is seen in the larger context of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), which could be both a driver and consumer of the halal business sector due to its combined Muslim population.

In this context, Malaysia's Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER), encompassing Perlis, Kedah, Penang and northern Perak, could become the engine of

growth for the IMT-GT in the halal sector, as Perlis had been earmarked to be a halal logistics centre in NCER.

This was the broad picture gleaned by a Malaysian delegation following its goodwill visit to Bangkok this week.

"We have come away with a better view of what the opportunities are in Thailand in terms of investing," World Halal Forum chairman Khairy Jamaluddin said.

He led the 32-strong team which included Halal Industry Development Corporation chief executive officer Datuk Jamil Bidin.

Thai businessmen have also been looking at how halal parks are being set up and managed, especially those in the NCER like Perlis, as well as in the Eastern Corridor, and see how they could supply the ingredients for the halal food products made in these parks, Khairy said.

Bringing economic development to Muslim-majority southern Thailand was among the suggestions Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi made during a recent visit to Thailand as one of the ways to elevate economic activities in those provinces and thus improve the lot of the people there and ease the security tension in those areas.

IMT-GT, established as an economic network, encompasses north Sumatra and Aceh in Indonesia; Kedah, Perlis, Penang and Perak in Malaysia; and Satun, Narathiwat, Yala, Songkhla and Pattani in Thailand, with a total population of about 20.5 million people.

Malaysia is aggressively promoting itself as a world halal hub while Thailand is keen to project itself as the hub of the halal industry in terms of services like hospitals, restaurants and tourism. — Bernama