

# Use position to boost trade, PM urges Syria

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**MALAYSIA** and Syria should use their positions in Asean and among Arab nations to increase trade between themselves and their two regions, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

The prime minister said Kuala Lumpur and Damascus must explore opportunities not only in bilateral trade but in the wider Southeast Asian and West Asian markets which held vast potential for Asean and the Arab world.

"I do believe that Malaysia and Syria have much to contribute to trade expansion, not only between our two countries but also among Organisation of Islamic Conference member countries as a whole.

"I would therefore like to urge both the Malaysian and Syrian business communities to increase their efforts to identify opportunities, especially in the context of taking advantage of our respective strengths," he told a business seminar here.

The seminar was held in conjunction with the prime minister's three-day official visit which began on Sunday.

At present, Malaysia's major exports to Syria are textiles, palm oil and transport equipment while imports are confined to printed materials and agricultural products.

Both Proton and Perodua have also made inroads into the Syrian automobile market.

Last year, Malaysia's trade with Asean countries stood at US\$75.3 billion (RM262 billion) while Syria's intra-OIC trade had been growing steadily in the last decade.

In 2004 Syria's total trade with OIC members stood at US\$3.5 billion and last year the figure was expected to have exceeded US\$5



**Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi meeting Syrian President Dr Bashar al-Assad at the People's Palace in Damascus yesterday. Abdullah also delivered a keynote address at the Malaysia-Syria Business Forum and held a dialogue with religious leaders. — AFP picture**

billion.

Abdullah told the seminar that apart from being able to penetrate the Asean market, Syrian businesses and companies could enter China, Japan and Korea through Kuala Lumpur's strong trade links with the East Asian countries.

Abdullah, who is on his first visit to Syria since becoming prime minister in 2003, told businessmen from both nations that it would be a great loss if the friendship between Malaysia and Syria was not fully exploited.

"One very large potential which exists not only for trading but also investment is in the area of halal products and services. I strongly believe that this can become a very important area for collaboration between Syrian and Malaysian businesses.

"I say this with conviction because the market for halal products and services exists not only in the Muslim world.

"Malaysia is determined to position itself as

the global halal hub and I'm confident that business communities from both countries can benefit from this move."

He also extended an open invitation to Syrian companies and businesses to visit and take part in the Malaysian International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) which would be held from May 9-13 in Kuala Lumpur.

Touching on Malaysia's economic scenario, Abdullah said the Ninth Malaysia Plan and the Third Industrial Masterplan set out to further boost the economy with fresh initiatives in various fields, including agriculture.

"In this regard I'm pleased to note that the Syrian government has also redirected its economic development priorities from industrial expansion to agricultural sectors.

"This will certainly help achieve food self-sufficiency, enhance export earnings and stem rural migration. Clearly, this is an area where Malaysia and Syria can benefit from enhanced collaboration," Abdullah said.