

# Better ties with Syrians

## Meeting to boost diplomatic and economic relations scheduled for May

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**DAMASCUS:** Bilateral relations between Malaysia and Syria will be taken to a higher level when the first Malaysian-Syrian Joint Commission meeting is held here in May.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said this was among the outcomes of his meeting with the Syrian leadership here yesterday.

Abdullah met with Syrian president Bashar al-Assad at the People's Palace, followed by a meeting with vice-president Farouq Al Shara and Prime Minister Mohd Naji Otri.

He said he intended to find ways for both countries to strengthen bilateral relations.

"God-willing we can achieve this objective, especially when we have decided that the inaugural Malaysia-Syria Joint Commission meeting will be held in Damascus in May," he said at a joint press conference with Mohd Naji.

Abdullah said a memorandum of understanding for the setting-up of a joint economic committee was also signed yesterday.

"I would welcome the active participation of our businessmen in realising the success of the projects that they have already identified," he said.

He added that successful cooperation depended very much on the response and active participation of the private sectors of both countries.

On his bilateral meeting with the Syrian leadership, Abdullah described them as "very successful."

"Our ministers have met and decided on the various types of programmes that we could together embark upon.

"Although my visit is very short, in terms of results it has been most productive," he added.

Abdullah also welcomed the setting-up of the Malaysia-Syria Business Forum.

Besides the memorandum for the establishment of the Joint Economic Committee, others signed yesterday were for the Damascus Ring Road project and the avoidance of double taxation.

Later when delivering a keynote address at a seminar on business opportunities in Malaysia and Syria, Abdullah said the two countries should make use of their long friendship to increase trade between them.

"Malaysia and Syria possess advantages that the business communities should build on.



**Friendly reception:** Abdullah shaking hands with Al-Assad during their meeting at the People's Palace in Damascus yesterday. — Bernama

"One of the most important is our strategic location within our respective regions, Malaysia in Asean and Syria in West Asia," he said.

He said Malaysia through the Asean Free Trade Area had access to a population of 567 million people in the region and a market worth US\$876.1bil (RM3tril).

"Similarly, Syria's location can facilitate access

for Malaysian businesses to the Arab world," he said.

Abdullah said that one very large potential for trade and investment was in the area of halal products and services.

He also invited Syrian businessmen to take part and visit the Malaysian International Halal Showcase in Kuala Lumpur from May 9 to 13.