

Planting the seeds for trade boost

Anwar's second China visit will see awaited debut of Malaysian jackfruit

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PETALING JAYA: The Prime Minister's second visit to China will coincide with the Malaysian jackfruit (nangka) making its debut in the Chinese market, which has the potential to boost exports of locally produced fruits, says Deputy Agriculture and Food Security Minister Chan Foong Hin.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is expected to attend the 20th China-Asean Expo (CAEXPO) 2023 and the Chinese-Asean Business and Investment Summit (Cabis) in Nanning, China, during a one-day working visit tomorrow - his second since March.

Chan said Anwar will launch the Malaysian Pavilion at CAEXPO 2023, which will showcase the diversity of the nation's agriculture products.

"This marks a crucial step in demonstrating the quality and readiness of Malaysian products for the Chinese market.

"We are confident that this will pave the way for a sustainable and prosperous trade relationship," he said.

Chan, who is in Nanning for the event, said Anwar will also witness the launch of fresh jackfruit in China.

"I believe this will boost exports of our high-value fruits to about RM30mil within a year," he added.

He said Malaysian jackfruit for the Chinese market will be of the J33 variety, which is known for having a sweeter taste and crunchy texture.

"It's popular in the domestic market due to its premium quality.

"I hope that fresh durian exports can also be realised by next year in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of Malaysia-China diplomatic ties and showcased at the 21st CAEXPO in 2024," he added.

The debut of Malaysian jackfruit in China came following nearly 20 years of negotiations between the two countries.

According to Chan, the agreement to export nangka to China was inked on April 1 following Anwar's maiden visit as prime minister to Beijing in March.

"Indeed, this is a very significant milestone for my ministry, as the Agriculture Department started the application process for China in 2004," he said.

Malaysian Fruit Farmers Association president Datuk Lawrence Ting Siew Haw said that currently, registrations had been approved by the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC) for eight facility factories and seven orchards in Pahang, Johor, Melaka and Selangor.

"Exporting Malaysia jackfruit to China can offer significant economic benefits to local jackfruit farmers or industry players and local exporters, provided they maintain the quality and requirements of the market in China," he said.

According to Ting, Malaysian jackfruit is

known for its distinct qualities that sets it apart from jackfruit produced in Thailand, Vietnam and China's Hainan province.

"These premium qualities contribute to the reputation of nangka as a high-quality fruit, comparable to the prestige associated with the Musang King durian," he added.

During his day trip to China, Anwar is also scheduled to meet Chinese Premier Li Qiang after attending CAEXPO 2023 and Cabis.

Nusantara Academy for Strategic Research senior fellow Azmi Hassan, who is also a geopolitics expert, said the 12th Malaysia Plan aligns with China's goals, which is prioritising the digital economy and high-tech investments.

"A face-to-face meeting is very important between Anwar and Li, so that the two can come up with something concrete," he said.

Azmi also regards China as a very important trading partner for Malaysia.

"That is why when it comes to geopolitics, Malaysia is treading very carefully," he said.

Centre for Market Education chief executive officer Carmelo Ferlito said that last year, China remained Malaysia's largest trading partner for a 14th consecutive year with 17.1% of Malaysia's total trade, expanding by 15.6% to RM487.13bil compared with 2021.

However, Ferlito said Malaysia should also look for other trading destinations.

"It is important for Malaysia to develop a multi-directional strategy to strengthen trade beyond China," he added.

Ferlito said exports of manufactured goods made up 84.2% of Malaysia's total exports in 2022, whereby electrical and electronic products (E&E) held the biggest share at 38.2%.

"Therefore, the jackfruit agreement, while important for local agriculture, must not be over-emphasised in terms of its weight on the generality of Malaysia's economy," he said.

This year, the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) is coordinating 107 Malaysian enterprises that are set to showcase products and services ranging from healthcare and wellness, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and toiletries, food and beverages, accounting, interior design and education.

The 20th CAEXPO is taking place from today until Tuesday.

Anwar's first visit in March saw Malaysia secure a record RM170bil worth of investment commitments from China.

The amount, the biggest so far from China, was from a total of 19 memoranda of understanding sealed between businesses in China and Malaysia in various fields, especially green technology and the digital economy.