

## **Malaysia, Laos Agree To Further Explore Areas of Cooperation**

**Bernama**

**Feb 28, 2016**

PUTRAJAYA, Feb 28 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Laos have agreed to explore many areas of cooperation to strengthen the existing bilateral relations between both countries.

This was reached during a bilateral meeting between Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman and Laos President Choummaly Sayasone during the former's official visit to Laos on Feb 28.

In a statement here today, the foreign ministry said Anifah paid a courtesy visit on Sayasone who wished that Laos and Malaysia's relations be further enhanced for the mutual benefit of both countries.

Anifah also held a bilateral meeting with his counterpart, Foreign Affairs Minister, Dr Thongloun Sisoulith, who is also the country's deputy prime minister.

The statement said both leaders had agreed that the Malaysia-Laos relationship, which was built on trust, respect and a strong bond of friendship, needed to be further developed in several areas to reap the full potential.

In this regard, the two ministers identified several areas of cooperation, among others, expansion in trade and investment, banking, education, tourism, air services, health and defence, it added.

During the meeting, Anifah assured Malaysia's fullest support to Laos' ASEAN Chairmanship 2016 and to continue the momentum that the 10-member bloc had created since the establishment of the ASEAN Community last December.

On bilateral economic cooperation, the statement said Anifah encouraged more Malaysian companies to invest in Laos, and seek opportunities to expand and diversify their businesses in the Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam region.

Malaysia also reiterated its interest to expand and share its banking expertise with Laos to further strengthen the financial institutions there.

On institutions of higher education, both leaders agreed that Malaysia and Laos should explore the initiation of twinning programme between institutions that would provide a platform for Laotian students to further their studies in Malaysia.

The statement said Malaysia had expressed appreciation to the Laotian Government for granting approval to AirAsia to commence the thrice weekly flights from Kuala Lumpur to Luang Prabang, beginning this July.

"The approval will certainly contribute to the increase in two-way tourists and provide value-added physical connectivity, which will boost people-to-people connectivity, in line with the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity," it added.

On healthcare, both Anifah and Dr Thongloun agreed to enhance cooperation in healthcare through collaboration on disease control, pharmaceuticals, food safety and research and development.

Malaysia, through its National Pharmaceutical Control Bureau, will offer technical expertise to establish networking and strengthen ties with relevant regulatory authorities.

As Malaysia and Laos will celebrate their 50th anniversary in the establishment of diplomatic relations on July 1, this year, both countries have also agreed on the possibility of convening the 4th Joint Commission Meeting, hosted by Laos, at a mutually convenient date.

Both countries have also agreed to finalise the memorandum of understanding defence cooperation in the near future.

Anifah also led the Malaysian delegation to the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat (AMM Retreat) in Vientiane, Laos on Feb 26 and 27.

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