

French President's Visit Hopefully Will Open More Trade Opportunities - King

KUALA LUMPUR, March 28 (Bernama) -- Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V said he hoped the working visit by French President Francois Hollande to Malaysia would help boost trade and investment between the two countries.

His Majesty said that he was confident that Malaysia and France would be able to explore further existing opportunities in terms of the economy, defence, health, education and air services.

"I also wish to express my appreciation to the government of France for providing opportunities to Malaysian companies towards empowering economic synergy in France.

"The opportunities in this field (economy) obviously help increase the nation's revenue and generate job opportunities for the citizens of both countries," he said at the state banquet hosted for Hollande and his delegation at Istana Negara tonight.

The reception held at the Main Dining Hall, Istana Negara was part of the events lined up for Hollande, who is on a two-day official visit to Malaysia since yesterday.

Also present were Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, cabinet ministers and invited dignitaries.

Sultan Muhammad V also said he hoped that the close ties between France and Malaysia which had been forged all this while would be further enhanced.

"Although this is a short visit, I hope it brings a thousand and one meaning to both countries and serve as a legacy on the close bilateral relations between Malaysia and France.

"Your visit further strengthens the already close and warm relations that long been enjoyed by the citizens of both countries. With a shared history and heritage, it can further strengthen ties and understanding," His Majesty said.

Meanwhile, Hollande in his speech said he wanted to visit Kuala Lumpur this year to celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations between the two nations.

"France was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the Federation of Malaya upon its independence in 1957 and I am sure that France's support for that young nation has not been forgotten," he said.

Hollande said France and Malaysia could bring strong partnerships in many areas with solid foundations and principles shared by both nations in the international arena.

Among others, he said were commitment to multilateralism, moderation, tackling climate change, rejection of extremism and terrorism, and a desire to help settle conflicts in strict compliance with international laws.

Hollande said he hoped that both nations could further consolidate their trade, defence cooperation, joint training and research programmes and cultural relations.

He drove home the point that both nations have created exemplary defence cooperation, based on strong mutual trust and a will to create genuine partnerships between manufacturers, which are of benefit to both parties.

"Our academic and research cooperation is also growing year by year and there are currently over 900 Malaysian students in France," he said.

As for trade partnerships, Hollande pointed out that the volume of their bilateral trade had doubled since 2010, and that thus far French companies had set up 28 subsidiaries in Malaysia, creating 26,000 direct jobs.

He added that there had been a significant increase in their investments and there was still plenty of room for progress on both sides.

The visit, beginning last night, is part of Hollande's first visit to ASEAN.

He had earlier made a state visit to Singapore and will be visiting Indonesia after Malaysia.

This is the second presidential-level visit from Paris to Kuala Lumpur after President Jacques Chirac's state visit in July 2003.

The visit is very timely as it also coincides with the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and France.

Earlier, Hollande, accompanied by ministers, members of parliament, officials, as well as a business delegation, had a business meeting with entrepreneurs prior to a restricted and delegation meeting with Najib in Putrajaya.

Both premiers witnessed the signing of deals which included a defence-related agreement and another agreement on the establishment of a platform for Sustainable Agriculture Landscapes in Southeast Asia.

Hollande then witnessed a static demonstration of the newly arrived A400M transporter aircraft at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang. He had an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong before the state banquet and will be leaving for Jakarta later tonight.

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