

Afghanistan hopes M'sia plays bigger role in its redevelopment, peace processes

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By Samantha Tan

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 7 (Bernama) – Afghanistan, a landlocked country located within south-central Asia, hopes Malaysia can play a bigger role in the redevelopment and peace processes in the conflict-torn country, says the country's ambassador to Malaysia, Atifmal Atifmal.

For starters, he said it was imperative for Malaysia to have an embassy in Kabul to strengthen bilateral relations and also visa facilitation, especially for businessmen and students who were keen to seek opportunities in the South-East Asian nation.

“My president (Ashraf Ghani) is ready to welcome Malaysia's Prime Minister (Tun) Dr Mahathir (Mohamad) to Afghanistan anytime. We hope some agreements could be signed between the two countries in higher education, trade and business, political and ministries of foreign affairs cooperation, as well as access to fruits,” he told Bernama in an interview recently.

Atifmal said his embassy was trying to arrange a meeting between the Afghanistan president and Dr Mahathir during an international conference or official visit.

He noted it was important for both leaders to meet and discuss bilateral ties, as well as strengthening people-to-people and parliament-to-parliament relations.

Atifmal also suggested the new Malaysian government appoint a non-resident ambassador to Kabul for the first step to boost bilateral cooperation between the two countries, particularly to expand trade and businesses.

“(The) First step is important to convince the leadership in Malaysia that Afghanistan is a

peaceful and safe country. We have over 42 embassies and 20 consuls-general, six flights from Dubai and New Delhi per day. This shows embassies functioning there are safe," he said.

Atifmal said currently, the Afghan people, especially businessmen and students were facing acute issues as Malaysia did not have an embassy in Kabul, adding that they needed to travel to India or Dubai to obtain visa to Malaysia.

"We currently have 600 Afghan students in Malaysia. If our relations with Malaysia could expand, more students will seek education here because the Afghan people are keen to send their children to study in Malaysia because it is a Muslim-majority country, with common cultures and similarities.

"Besides that, it is also important for us (Afghans) to see how Malaysians of different ideology, ethnicity, race and religion can work together.

"The Afghan people should come and learn how to live together in harmony and friendship," he added.

On business cooperation, Atifmal said in May last year, the Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia (MCCM) and Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce & Industries (ACCI) signed a memorandum of understanding to establish the Malaysia-Afghanistan Business Council.

He said the council would be a milestone for the future economic cooperation between Afghanistan and Malaysia, adding that Afghanistan was currently in the process of accessing fresh and dried fruits for the Malaysian market.

The ambassador said although there was no direct access between Kuala Lumpur and Kabul, it was possible for his country to export goods to Malaysia. This follows an agreement inked between Iran, India and Afghanistan on Oct 23, on the transit of goods via Iran's southeastern port city of Chabahar.

“There are many possibilities to expand the bilateral relations. We are no longer a landlocked country because we have the Chabahar Port, over which we signed an agreement with Iran and India. Now, many businesses and companies have set up office for trade,” he added.

Atifmal pointed out that another possibility to engage in trade was through the Lapis Lazuli transport corridor, created in November last year, which was set to connect five countries, namely Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey.

He said Afghanistan needed manufactured and electronic goods, machineries and halal products, including Islamic banking from Malaysia, while Afghanistan had natural resources where Malaysian companies could come and explore the opportunities.

The ambassador said Afghanistan required expertise in aggregation system, hotel development and management as well as reconstruction for the development of new city, for three million Afghans in the future.

“Malaysia has good experience in construction and building, and in Afghanistan we need the housing system, as millions of people are in dire need of housing. We have a new city for three million Afghans, to be built in the future and in phases with hospitals, roads, schools and hotels. We are in need of investments from foreigners,” he noted.

Atifmal said Afghanistan was blessed with plenty of natural resources and it required experience from Malaysia to go there and help them to develop the industry, adding that the presence of Malaysians in Afghanistan could also help in the peace process in view of its friendly position in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

Edited by Gerald Raja

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