

Senegal beckons Malaysian businessmen

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From Muin Abdul Majid

DAKAR, Jan 16 (Bernama) – Malaysian companies have been urged to tap trade and investment opportunities available in Senegal, to which investors from other countries are making a beeline.

In making the call, the Malaysian ambassador to this Western African country, Dr Shazelina Zainul Abidin, said that compared to some other African nations, Senegal possessed key ingredients for trade and investment to flourish, one of the more important being stability.

"Like any business, it's a gamble but with the current political administration (in Senegal) it's a good gamble," she told Malaysian journalists ahead of the Jan 16-17 working visit to Senegal by Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the Third International Conference on the Emergence of Africa (ICEA-III).

She said that as it was, opportunities could be had, among others, in Senegal's oil and gas, infrastructure, tourism and education sectors.

Ambassador Shazelina spoke about the achievement of Malaysia's Iris Corporation which is producing the identity card for Senegal citizens that also contains voter registration information – a very important aspect in the country's presidential polls scheduled for Feb 24.

"Senegal is the first country in West Africa to have that kind of national ID card that its citizens can use as a form of identification when they cross the border into some neighbouring countries," said the envoy who had been stationed here for the past one year.

Besides Senegal, she is also accredited to Mali, Burkina Faso, The Gambia and Cape Verde.

On education, Ambassador Shazelina said Senegalese were pursuing post-graduate studies in Malaysia, thanks to the cooperation forged between the education ministries of the two countries.

Petronas, she said, was expanding into Senegal with a 30 per cent stake in an offshore exploration block.

The envoy alluded to the futuristic city of Diamniadio, an urban project east of Dakar which aimed to cut down overcrowding in the nation's capital and also part of a national strategy to promote economic growth.

Diamniadio, she said, was something that was close to Malaysia because it was modelled after the Malaysian administrative capital of Putrajaya.

"Therein lies another area of cooperation that is being explored as they would like to find out how we managed to move (the federal administrative hub) from Kuala Lumpur to Putrajaya because now they need to move ministries as well as agencies under the United Nations to Diamniadio," she explained.

Ambassador Shazelina further said that Senegal had emulated Malaysia in terms of crafting national development plans and strategies, and was also keen to learn from Malaysia's experience in 'waqf' and haj management.

"A lot of things were modelled after Malaysia, this is why we need to capitalise on that. So do come to Senegal while there is still the opportunity, potential and stability," she said, pointing out that countries like China, Turkey as well as the United Kingdom and others were cranking up their investments in French-speaking Senegal.

She said more and more Senegalese were making the effort to speak English, realising that

it was a tool needed in the international arena.

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