

TAPPING SOUTH AFRICAN MARKET

Act now, Dollah tells businessmen

By JAHABAR SADIQ

THE Government wants local businessmen to visit South Africa now to lay the groundwork to do business there when trade sanctions against that country are lifted, which will be "very soon", according to Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"It is very difficult to decide on the exact date but it will happen very soon," Abdullah told newsmen after launching a diplomatic training course for the African National Congress (ANC) in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

In May, International Trade and Industry Deputy Minister Chua Jui Meng said Malaysia is likely to lift its trade embargo on South Africa in September.

Talk of lifting the trade embargo surfaced following agreement between the white South African Government and the ANC to hold an all-race election by April next year.

"It is about time that Malaysian businessmen visit



□ ABDULLAH

the country to sound out the opportunities and establish contacts there so that once we lift the embargo they can do business immediately," Abdullah added.

The trade embargo was imposed more than 30 years ago after South Africa implemented the apartheid system in the country. Malaysia resumed people-to-people links in 1991 and started air links last year.

In 1990, total trade with South Africa, through third countries, stood at RM5.68 million and increased marginally to RM5.84 million last year.

Earlier in his speech, Abdullah said the potential for vibrant economic relations between both countries is vast as South Africa has human and physical resources, raw materials and food items which are in demand overseas.

Its developed infrastructure, and experienced business community, together with its strategic location, will ensure that it plays an important role in the immediate future of the region, he added.

"Economic cooperation in development should be explored and cooperation in trade and investment should be pursued to ensure our mutual strength," he said, adding that both countries need to forge linkages in the context of cohesiveness.

Malaysia Airlines flights to Johannesburg, he said, will boost economic links between the two countries and

help spur development of the country.

Abdullah pointed out that Malaysia has supported the ANC since the 1960s, and said the country is willing to send its officials to help conduct the elections there next year if asked.

"We have been supporting them this long and we will continue to support them in the future," he said, adding that the diplomatic course is part of the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme.

He said Malaysia has provided US\$10 million (US\$1 = RM2.57) to the ANC for the construction of housing for future ANC civil servants in Cape Town and Pretoria. The project is expected to be completed later this month or early next month.

Twenty ANC officials are attending the nine-week course conducted by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations Malaysia. Six Bosnia-Herzegovina participants who were to attend the course could not make it as they were unable to leave Sarajevo.