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## **Malaysia-Iran Trade Likely To Rise This Year: Matrade**

**By Harizah Hanim Mohamed**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 13 (Bernama) -- The lifting of economic sanctions on Iran could boost bilateral trade between Malaysia and the country as well as open doors for local entrepreneurs to expand in sectors other than palm oil products, says the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade).

Chief Executive Officer Datuk Dzulkifli Mahmud told Bernama recently that bilateral trade between the two countries dipped slightly last year due to lower imports of petroleum products by Iran and issues surrounding payments for Malaysia's exports.

Malaysia's imports from Iran comprise mostly crude oil and bitumen.

Dzulkifli said Matrade will continue to organise trade missions to the Persian Gulf nation of some 70 million consumers.

"We should look beyond palm oil, because for the commodity segment, there are ups and downs, whereas other sectors or products such as machinery parts and components are not exposed to volatility," he said.

According to the Department of Statistics, Malaysia's total exports to Iran dropped 10.6 per cent to RM1.95 billion in 2015 versus RM2.18 billion in 2014.

Total imports last year reduced by 25.6 per cent to RM139.5 million from RM187.4 million in the previous year.

Malaysia's palm oil exports to Iran dropped 42.1 per cent to 447,058 tonnes in 2014 from 635,258 tonnes in 2013

Malaysia's exports of palm products, meanwhile, fell 36 per cent to 515,231 tonnes in 2014, due to the sanctions on Iran and its discriminatory policy on palm oil imports.

Iran's Ambassador to Malaysia, Marzieh Afkham, said that both countries are expected to go for another round of talks on the palm oil issue.

"It is up to the Malaysian side to start. Some delegations (of both countries) have exchanged views on the matter, and there might be another new round of talks," she told reporters at the 37th anniversary celebrations here of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Afkham noted that economic ties between Malaysia and Iran are expected to be stronger this year with the recent lifting of economic sanctions on the latter, adding that the bilateral trade volume could increase.

"Both countries can focus on improving their relationships, particularly the economic, political and cultural aspects, fortunately both sides are eager, and we are very optimistic about it (increase in trade)," she said.

Earlier in her welcoming speech, Iran's first woman ambassador since the revolution said her government seeks to boost economic cooperation and attract foreign investments, predicting annual investments worth US\$200 billion in the energy sector.

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