

MALAYSIA-CZECH REPUBLIC COOPERATION

TAKING TIES TO ANOTHER LEVEL

Both countries prioritise innovation, education and smart solutions among industry players

RUPA DAMODARAN

KUALA LUMPUR

rupabanerji@mediaprima.com.my

THE Czech Republic has a long tradition in design and manufacturing in the electrical and electronics sector, making it a perfect fit for future strategic relations with Malaysia.

With already more than US\$1 billion (RM4.2 billion) in annual bilateral trade, both countries were well-positioned to take the relationship to another level, said Czech Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Martin Tlapa.

Political and security interests aside, he said research and development now featured in the cooperation was to ensure that output was more high value-added to

meet global demands.

"It is the same story for Malaysia where innovation, education and smart solutions are prioritised," said Tlapa in an interview.

Malaysian universities are working closely with Czech technical colleges.

Malaysia is recognised as a prominent market in the region and the Czech Republic wants a more visible presence in the country.

Tlapa flew to Kota Kinabalu on Saturday to open the Czech Republic's consulate office, which will facilitate the high rate of visitors from the republic to Sabah, which averages at 20,000 annually.

Bilateral trade totalled US\$1.16 billion,

with Czech exports amounting to US\$186.7 million while imports from Malaysia were US\$975.8 million.

Trade mainly included technological components such as computer components, electronics and semiconductors.

Many Czech brands have become household names in Malaysia, such as Skoda, Aero, Bata and Avast.

Tlapa believes that his country will play an important role in Industry 4.0.

The government is creating the climate for new innovative solutions and synergy among the players.

Tlapa is also hopeful that the upcoming visit of International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed to Brussels, where he is scheduled to meet European trade commissioner Ce-



Martin Tlapa

cilia Malmstrom, would mark a new beginning for the European Union-Malaysia free-trade agreement talks.

"It will drive new investments, acquisitions and visits by businesses," he said.

The timing for the talks would be good as economies in Europe are picking up steam on the back of an improving global growth.

Eight Czech companies participated in the three-day International Greentech and Eco Products Exhibition and Conference Malaysia, which ended on Friday.

There are 20 Czech companies in Malaysia, mostly supplying products such as machine tools, food and beverage, firearms, radar technology, water treatment, outdoor equipment and communication systems. Some companies are involved in providing solutions for mass rapid transit and light rail transit control centres.

